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FOUR STUDIES OF LOVE.

“‘Shepherd, what is love? I pray thee tell!’—
‘It is that fountain, and that well,
Where pleasure and repentance dwell;
It is, perhaps, that passing bell
That tolls us all to heaven or hell;
And this is love, as I heard tell.’”

SIR WALTER RALEIGH.

FOUR STUDIES OF LOVE.

BY A. W. DUBOURG,

JOINT AUTHOR OF THE COMEDY, "NEW MEN AND OLD ACRES."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

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TO MY UNCLE,

GEORGE DUBOURG,

(AUTHOR OF "THE VIOLIN," ETC.)

THESE FOUR STUDIES OF LOVE,

(ALL OF THEM CONCEIVED, AND THREE OF THEM FIRST WRITTEN,

IN DRAMATIC FORM,)

Are Dedicated

WITH FEELINGS OF SINCERE REGARD.

1
New York, May 21, 1854

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SAVED BY LOVE.

(AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.)

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I.

SAVED BY LOVE.

(AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.)

AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.



CHAPTER I.

MISS LINDSAY THROWS DOWN THE GAUNTLET.

SOME said the ship had weathered the storm and arrived safely in port ; others said that an aged pilgrim had crossed Jordan. These persons dealt largely in metaphor, and dwelt at or about Dulwich, in which locality Jacob Vaughan had himself resided. Some said simply old Jacob's dead ; what the deuce is he worth ? These persons lived by day in the City, returning to late dinner at Dulwich ; certain of them became metaphorical after dinner—indeed, from after dinner on Saturday until the following Monday morn-

ing, when they returned to simple language in the City, their wives and families remaining at Dulwich and retaining the use of metaphor throughout the week. Betwixt Vaughan's death and his funeral two questions were warmly debated in the neighbourhood—saving grace and probate value, and, incidental of course to probate value, the question of the destination of the property.

Certain metaphorical persons—they were chiefly ladies, the husbands being absent in the City—offered balm of comfort to Mrs. Corley, who was the sister of the deceased; they talked a great deal about resignation founded upon faith, and they also referred frequently to the passage of the Jordan. But Mrs. Corley was inconsolable, for while they thus talked she was thinking wistfully on the destination of the property. Had that point been decided in her favour, she would have been able to accept with Christian meekness the monitions to a pious resignation; she had, however, most unfortunately

been for some few years on bad terms with her rich brother, and really the two questions got so intermingled in her head, that whether people talked of grace, or probate, or next of kin, or Jordan, the result was unmitigated sorrow.

As for Mr. Corley, he had been for many years a waiter upon fortune. He was "something in the City," a profession which afforded him a reasonable competence, but not affluence. Metaphorical as was his habit at Dulwich, he was accustomed to use the simplest language in the City. "It's a d—d bad business!" he said to a sympathetic friend who addressed him on the question of probate value; "I'm not even asked to the funeral."

Two of the greatest difficulties of a man's life, or, more strictly speaking, of a man's existence *upon* this earth, having regard to those persons who are anxious to avoid giving offence to friends and neighbours, are dinner-parties and funerals. To both of these functions is attached the necessity

of selection, with the heartburning consequences of invidious distinction. It is, indeed, possible to avoid the dilemma in the case of dinner-parties, by simply not giving dinners; but burial is inevitable, and the friendships of a life have often been shattered by a funeral.

Not that the late Mr. Vaughan cared about giving offence here and there—(of course, being dead, he ought to be alluded to in the past tense). It is difficult to realize the fact of a man being dead when his *volition* lives, and acts, and re-acts, and moulds the lives of others, through the power of his will—"being dead, he yet speaketh," in the parchment voice of probate. And what was the offence which had estranged Jacob Vaughan from his family? It was true that he was wayward and ungenerous by nature, of a mean and narrow spirit; but these things are easily forgiven in the possessor of wealth. He had erred in the one offence for which there was no forgiveness in the mean, narrow, selfish natures

that surrounded him ;—he had married late in life.

The fire of Jacob's youth had been burnt out in the counting-house ; a smouldering fire, never a bright generous flame, the counting-house had sufficed for its feeding ; money-getting was the meat and drink of his soul. At last the term of his partnership expired ; it was intimated to him by his partners that the time for his retirement had arrived. He prayed earnestly, with tears even, for a renewal of the partnership at any cost ; but young men were ready to step into his shoes. The partners were inexorable, and Jacob balanced the dearly-loved ledgers for the last time, and closed them with a heavy heart, and then he was thrust out into the cold, hard world, an old man, to begin life once more, with pockets full of gold. Poor old man ! all the temptations of life around him, and only senility to urge as an excuse for folly.

He tried the innocent, but costly, amusement of water-colour drawings, with some

success at first—not that he cared one jot for foregrounds, or middle distances, or sky effects—the dealer's assertion of value was beauty enough for him, and the emulation of acquisition and possession afforded the excitement he required. The passion, however, did not last very long. He lacked dash and boldness in his buying—the picture-dealers alarmed him with their prices; other connoisseurs, with equal ignorance but greater nerve, carried off the prizes of the annual exhibitions; and at last he gave up the fine modern art of buying pictures, in disgust.

He tried other pursuits with indifferent success, and at last, as a final expedient, he married. His sister, Mrs. Corley, possessed among other household drudges a governess, a young lady of about twenty-four—interesting rather than absolutely handsome, with elegant, refined manners, which, in their very unobtrusiveness, stood forth in marked contrast with the *brusquerie* of Mrs. Corley. That lady's tyranny towards

her servants was tempered by a wholesome amount of fear, but with regard to Miss Mabel Smith, tyranny had full swing, for governesses are more plentiful than cooks, and therefore more easily replaced. The girl meekly endured her slavery, because her parents and a sick sister lived hard by in a small cottage, supported partly by her scanty wages; and, through the grudging grace of Mrs. Corley, she was permitted once or twice during the week to visit her parents and the invalid and cheer them by her presence.

It is a difficult matter to inflate a withered heart with love, but the blind god was equal to the occasion. Jacob had always been fond in a carking spirit of running counter to his sister, and because she tyrannized over the governess, he sided with the oppressed out of pure nagging opposition. It was not a very hopeful seed for eventual growth into love and marriage. Love, however, cheerfully made the best of it, and fostered the sprouting shoot to good

purpose. The thought of Mabel Smith gradually took root in Jacob's mind. There was something very fascinating in the idea of tyranny. His sister ruled the pleasant, elegant-looking girl with a rod of iron—the girl quailed before her. Why should he not possess a slave who would bend, if he so chose it, to his will? And then there was something indescribably alluring in the girl's tears—so love conquered Jacob. Mabel was wholly innocent of all suspicion as to Mr. Vaughan's passion; but Mrs. Corley possessed quick, suspicious eyes. Without more ado, Mabel was summoned to a special interview with her mistress. Mrs. Corley was very angry, and not at all logical; the girl's duplicity was first ruthlessly denounced, and ignorance of offence being pleaded as a rejoinder, an accusation of falsehood and prevarication followed, and finally the head and front of the offence was disclosed—an insidious attempt to win the heart and hand of Mr. Jacob Vaughan. Anxious as Mabel was to

retain her situation for the sake of those at home, she could scarcely resist bursting into a laugh, so entirely preposterous did the idea appear. Her suppressed laugh was fatal. Branded as a heartless adventuress, she was turned out of Mrs. Corley's house, and that lady resolved from thenceforth, or at least during Jacob's lifetime, that no home governess should be harboured in her family circle. Of course, after Jacob's decease the question of home tuition might be viewed in other lights.

On the other hand, at the cottage, although they kept silence on the subject, the idea of a rich husband did not seem so *very* preposterous to Mabel's parents and sister. A rich husband for Mabel meant many comforts which are almost necessities for invalids; it meant, for instance, the south coast of England, which the doctors had one and all recommended for the sick girl who lay, day by weary day, on a sofa in a small cheerless room. Mabel's father, too, had seen better days, and ill health had

incapacitated him from all active work. When Mabel thought these things over she shuddered.

Ah ! a pleasant bright villa at Torquay ; comforts and luxuries now impossible for her to afford out of her scanty purse ; the best medical advice, without stint ; better and more nourishing food, better wine—*all* at the cost of her hand. The first night of her return home she lay awake thinking of these things, while her sister slept, breathing uneasily, at her side ; and she wept bitterly, for she loved a young man who was far away, yet ever present in her heart. But Mabel throughout her life had been so accustomed to think of others, that it always seemed wickedness to her to think of herself.

Jacob Vaughan paid a visit to the cottage and “took stock,” as he termed it, of the family affairs. In his selfish thoughts he quickly perceived the chains by which he might bind this noble girl, and make her his abject slave. An old man—but in the

strength of her love for her parents and sister, he felt that he might safely defy all younger rivals as well before as after marriage—that he might rule and govern her young life at his will. Mother, father, and sister all declared, with tears in their eyes, that Mabel had been the most loving and devoted daughter and sister from her childhood—ever unselfish and self-denying. Jacob was well pleased with this assurance; it was evident to him that at the small cost of, say, some three or four hundred a year, this fair woman could be made as securely his as if she were immured in a strong tower guarded by a thousand guards.

He spoke fairly enough, did Jacob; he made his offer without much preface or ado. She sat and trembled as he addressed his suit to her. “I’m not a young man,” said he, taking a seat at her side after the avowal had been made. “I can’t exactly expect you to love me as you would love a younger man, but still you may love an old man for his good heart. I mean to be very kind and

good to you"—he took her reluctant hand—"aye, and to *them* also," he added, and her hand lay without resistance in his. Thus emboldened, his arm stole round her waist. She started up almost with a shriek, for she had sworn that no man's arm, save *his* arm who was far away, should ever clasp her waist; and then the thought of that last interview flashed into her mind when she had parted from *him* and broken off their hopeless engagement, though she had herself sworn in her own soul, then and there, to be ever true and faithful; and fiery words of rebuke rose on her lips, and anger and indignation gathered in her eyes. And then Jacob talked of that villa at Torquay, and of the many comforts he could and would afford for parents and invalid, and so the fiery words died away, and anger and indignation turned into tears, and with all submissiveness, but with beating heart, she let him hold her in his arms; and thus talking, he was presently venturesome enough to kiss her lips. She wrenched

herself from his grasp, and with a cry of agony hurried out of the room, leaving him utterly dumbfounded.

It was a very small house. Oh, for some place of intense solitude, far away, buried in distant hills, where she, and shame, and despair, could be alone together! She flew to the little room she shared with her sister. Her sister was in the ordinary sitting-room, reclining, as was her wont, with Christian resignation and meek endurance, on the sofa. She locked the door, and fell sobbing on the bed. "Oh, my God," she cried in her agony, "have mercy—not this horror, not this degradation—save me from this loathsome life." She did not dare to cry very loudly—even in this hour of agony she retained her thoughtfulness for others. The partitions were very thin; so she buried her face deep in the pillow, and stifled her sobs, and terrible thoughts of abhorrence racked her pure and maidenly heart. But the duty of self-sacrifice on behalf of her afflicted sister and her father

had been taught her thoroughly well, and this lesson, earliest of all lessons, was so inwoven into her character, that it retained its virtue even in these supreme moments of despair. "God," they had taught her, "had made her strong, and well, and healthy, and it was for her to bear the cross her sister could not carry ;—her afflicted sister, who was forced to remain, by the mercy of Heaven's all-wise and beneficent ruling, a prisoner to her bed and sofa."

Mabel prayed that she might die rather than endure the shame of such a marriage ; but she quickly remembered that she must not die, that she had no business to think of death ; that life, not death, was her business—life lived for the sake of taking care of those at home. At last the sobs died away, and sharp agony became a dull aching. She had felt nearly as much pain ere this, when she had given up, and prudently and wisely too, the young lover she still loved. After a time she bathed her red eyes, and

arranged her disordered hair, and went quietly downstairs, and busied herself in making a custard pudding for her sister, who loved dear Mabel's puddings so much, or rather as much as she could like any edible thing, and Mabel baked it deftly too.

"Good Mabel, dear Mabel, precious Mabel," cried the invalid gleefully, when Mabel carried in the pudding baked to a very turn, as custard pudding must be baked, and she kissed Mabel with her thin pain-drawn lips, and looked so bright, and pleased, and grateful. Neither father, nor mother, nor invalid alluded directly to the offer. They had learned by experience the policy of leaving Mabel alone with her well-trained conscience. They talked, however, a good deal about Providence, and they thought a great deal about themselves.

Every one loved the poor invalid: she was so very patient, and uncomplaining, and resigned. The metaphorical persons held her in deep love and reverence; they would come and sit with her, and sym-

pathize with her, and ask her test questions as to the state of her soul, and her replies were always very edifying—a sweetness as of frankincense and myrrh, and a great richness of godly savour; it was indeed esteemed by many to be a very precious privilege to listen to her words, and assist at the unveiling of her soul. Yes, she knew she was the very greatest of all sinners; that her crimes were of the very blackest dye. Aye, they assented readily. But did she possess faith? they inquired anxiously. Yes, she would reply meekly, with upraised eyes. But not in works? they rejoined in still greater anxiety. No, not in works, she would answer firmly; Heaven forbid! grace, saving grace, was her only faith. It was very affecting, and people often cried. Some ladies said to her mother, as they left the room, lingering awhile in the little passage, “Dear Mrs. Smith, be sure that little parlour of yours is an ante-chamber to heaven.” These ladies usually left tracts behind them, and they sometimes sent

jelly, although jelly in its nature savours of works.

As for Mabel, she didn't feel all her sister felt, and she used in early days to cry at the thought of her own inherent depravity. Indeed, as a young girl she had often prayed to be afflicted in the manner of her sister, and forced to recline upon a sofa, and enjoy all the spiritual blessings of faith.

One day, shortly after Jacob's offer had been accepted, and a great scandal had been created thereby, a lady, who had recently taken a house in the neighbourhood, and who was reputed to be soundly metaphorical, paid a visit to the Smiths' cottage.

Metaphor possesses the faculty of enabling people to enter the houses of others upon the slenderest introductions ; and Miss Lindsay, the lady in question, a spinster of a certain age, jerked herself suddenly into the invalid's presence with very little preliminary ceremony.

"This is my poor afflicted one," said Mrs. Smith, pointing to her daughter on the sofa.

“Good morning,” responded Miss Lindsay mechanically, for her eyes were engaged in surveying the room.

“I have two invalids to think of,” continued Mrs. Smith, mournfully. “My husband is far from enjoying the blessings of health.”

“Can’t work,” rejoined the visitor in an unsympathetic tone.

“He is, I am sorry to say, incapacitated from taking an active part in the duties of life.”

“Don’t earn money, eh?”

“No, alas! the doctors forbid all physical exertion. Of course, our means are very much narrowed.”

“Of course they are,” rejoined Miss Lindsay. “Where’s your other girl?”

“My daughter Mabel is giving a lesson,” responded Mrs. Smith, with some hesitation (the fact was that Mrs. Smith was almost ashamed of mentioning Mabel’s name, so greatly had the good people around been horrified by the proposed marriage). “Mabel

has always been a good girl," continued Mrs. Smith apologetically, "whatever persons may choose to say about her—most devoted to her parents and her sister."

"I don't doubt it, ma'am," answered Miss Lindsay; "I came here to see her. Good morning;" and Miss Lindsay rose to depart.

"Won't you say a few words to poor Mary?" asked Mrs. Smith, amazed by Miss Lindsay's want of conformity to metaphorical usage.

"Haven't time, ma'am; I only deal with sinners."

"But the blessed unction that was poured down Aaron's beard," pleaded Mrs. Smith.

"Unction? fiddlesticks!" ejaculated Miss Lindsay, and she suddenly opened a wallet bag at her side, which contained a large assortment of tracts, classified into bundles of convenient size by elastic bands. Selecting one of these publications, she jerked it with an action similar to that of dealing cards, to the invalid, and with a repetition of "good morning," left the room.

Mrs. Smith had never experienced such behaviour in her life, and—the meek of soul are often stout holders by dignity—she snatched up the tract, read the title, “Stiff Collars; or, Don’t be Stuck up,” with indignation, and pursued the visitor into the passage.

“Oh, ma’am, not this,” she cried; “my sweet child is full of meekness and humility—she don’t require this.”

“Don’t she?” retorted Miss Lindsay, abruptly ending all discussion by slamming the house door. Whether the words, “Don’t she” signified a query or conveyed a sarcastic rebuke, Mrs. Smith could not quite determine; but she returned to her daughter in a state of great exasperation.

“Don’t fret, mother dear,” said the invalid, sweetly. “Let us endure all things to the end, knowing withal that our faith has a sure foundation,” and Mrs. Smith, with tears in her eyes, kissed her daughter’s forehead.

It so chanced that Miss Lindsay encoun-

tered Mabel Smith close to her own residence.

“You’re Mabel Smith,—I’m Miss Lindsay,” exclaimed that lady, by way of introduction. “I want to talk to you—come in.” Miss Lindsay was accustomed to speak in a tone of authority, and she led Mabel, who was of course well aware of Miss Lindsay’s theological standing in the neighbourhood, into her house. When they had entered the sitting-room, Miss Lindsay closed the door.

“Take notice,” she began, abruptly, after scrutinizing Mabel from head to foot, “that I don’t affect the graces of society; I always say what I feel. Most people tell lies, and are therefore sugary on the surface. My sugar, if I have any, is all underneath, and requires patience before you get a taste. Now to business. Mrs. Corley says you are a wicked, insidious, designing girl.”

“Madam,” exclaimed Mabel, indignantly.

“Hush! don’t make a noise,” continued Miss Lindsay, with authoritative manner.

“That’s what Mrs. Corley says, and all her friends. Now, mark me—I hate kissing as a rule, but I’m going to kiss you;” and Miss Lindsay suddenly kissed Mabel, to Mabel’s great astonishment. “There, that’s a proof of what I think about you—it’s an honest woman’s kiss, not one of your Judas’s kisses. So you’re going to marry a man you don’t care twopence for.”

“Really, madam,” protested Mabel, blushing.

“Don’t prevaricate,” retorted Miss Lindsay. “Not twopence. What woman could? When I heard the story, I said to myself, ‘This girl is either very bad or very good.’ I love bad people—the worse they are, the better I love ’em, because I delight in conversion—and I love good people from their great rarity, just as I love a glass of very old port, when I get it. There’s goodness and goodness, mind you, and I hate *that* sort of goodness, because you can’t convert it; and yet it wants conversion badly enough. Well, I was very curious to see you. I went to your home——”

“What did they say about me?” asked Mabel, nervously.

“Little enough, but it was enough for me. Bless you, my eyes are trained to see the truth through brick walls. I *saw* you were a good girl, and I cried from the time I left your house till I met you here.”

“Why, Miss Lindsay?” asked Mabel, in astonishment.

“Because I’ve got a heart,” answered Miss Lindsay, briefly. “You’ll want a deal of prayer, my girl, to help you through with it—a husband like that. I know it’s plaguy hard to pray with a heavy heart. I know it has pleased the Almighty—I can’t tell why, but that’s not our business—to isolate you in this affair from all help at the hands of those who should help. Come to me—I’m sent to help you. Depend upon it, He thought it was too heavy a burden for you to be left quite alone without any human love for support. It’s your right to come to me, remember. Walk straight into this room, and say, ‘Margaret Lindsay, I

want you.' It will be my bounden duty to obey the call."

When Miss Lindsay's voice lost its asperity it became very sweet. In an instant it touched Mabel's heart, and she burst into tears. "Bless you," she murmured, and she sank down at Miss Lindsay's feet. "I think sometimes it will kill me," she muttered, speaking her own thoughts rather than directly addressing Miss Lindsay. "When I think what *he* will say and feel, I almost go mad; the thoughts are always worse at night, and I daren't cry for fear of disturbing poor Mary."

"Who is *he*?" asked Miss Lindsay, going bluntly to the point.

"The man I love," answered Mabel.

"Where is *he*?"

"Far away—a civil engineer—Tiflis. It's all broken off now—we are both quite free; only I'm not free, I never can be free, because I love him. What will he think of me," she sobbed, "when he hears of this marriage?"

“What do they say about this at home?” inquired Miss Lindsay.

“They know the engagement is broken off. It was a foolish boy-and-girl engagement, they always said. It was a foolish engagement, I know,” she added, mournfully, “for he had nothing—only, God knows, it was true love.”

“Alas! I feared all this,” said Miss Lindsay, with tears in her eyes.

“Sometimes—sometimes—” cried Mabel, and she hesitated.

“Sometimes, my child?” inquired Miss Lindsay.

“No, no—impossible!” exclaimed Mabel, leaving the broken sentence unfinished. “He’s taken a villa for them at Torquay, a lovely sea-view. They are so pleased at the idea—the very thought of it has made Mary better already. We’ve been to choose the chintz this morning, he and I; and he’s ordered a new invalid couch for Mary, and——” In a fresh burst of grief she clung convulsively to Miss Lindsay. “Bless

you, dear lady, for seeking me—for letting me have my cry out at your house;—it would vex them so at home—I daren't cry there. I must do it—I must do it!" she added, with rapid utterance; "if I don't kill myself before that accursed wedding day," and she buried her face in Miss Lindsay's lap. "You are a woman," she gasped, in painful voice; "you can guess what I feel—how my whole womanhood revolts at the thought."

Not a word did Miss Lindsay vouchsafe; she let the girl cling to her, and she made shift to open her wallet with all its stores of faith, and admonition, and consolation; her fingers ran over the little bundles with that sensitive knowledge with which fingers run over the keys of a piano. Three or four times did her fingers thus run, and each time with greater hesitation. At length, with a deep sigh, she closed the wallet, for the first time in her life, without withdrawing a tract. Miss Lindsay never spoke unless she had some definite thing

to say. She remained silent until the girl had ceased sobbing, and when Mabel raised her face, Miss Lindsay kissed her. There seemed to be some soothing comfort in the kiss, and Mabel rose to her feet.

"It's past five," she exclaimed, anxiously. "Mary's tea, and she can't bear the girl's thick toast. Bless you for all the good you've done to me!" she cried, as she kissed Miss Lindsay with a heartfelt kiss.

"Remember, you're to walk in," answered Miss Lindsay, "just as you are, bonnet or not, fine dress or scrubby, and say, 'Margaret Lindsay, I want you.' Good-bye," and Mabel hurried away.

"Beaten," exclaimed Miss Lindsay, with sorrow and mortification, as soon as she was alone. She sat a while reflecting. "Dumb, too, when I had great need to speak! This is your doing, hey!" and she leaned her elbows on the table, and bent forward as if in the act of addressing some one on the opposite side. "You were here, were you? and in this room, too, you scoundrel! I

thought, as I walked up the road, that you must be at the bottom of the mischief, or Margaret Lindsay would not have been set to look after this girl. It's no use, I tell you," she continued, tauntingly, and her face wore an expression of ineffable contempt. "Margaret Lindsay's got the girl, recollect—you've had many a hard tussle with Margaret—Margaret's going to keep watch over that girl's soul. You'd best be off, I say"—Miss Lindsay shook her bonnet defiantly—"you contemptible hound! I've got the sharp sword and the buckler. Avaunt, I say, or you'll get the worst of it!" and Miss Lindsay rose from her chair, and turned her back on her invisible adversary with contempt.

"Is it too late for this week's 'Brazen Vessel,' I wonder? No, Wednesday evening for insertion in Saturday's edition. Not a moment to be lost, though," and Miss Lindsay returned to the table and seized pen and paper with energy. "Urgent," she headed her note to the editor of the

“Vessel.” “Earnest prayer is anxiously asked on behalf of a young girl who is obliged, through pressure of family affairs, to enter into the holy state of matrimony with an old man.” She folded up the note and addressed the envelope. “Pooh!” she exclaimed derisively, “you may sneer and snigger over my shoulder as much as ever you like; but I shall pray hard for her myself up to Saturday afternoon. The first edition of the ‘Vessel’ catches the early morning trains to the country. They’ll be hard at prayer by Saturday evening throughout England; Glasgow will get it by the last train. You don’t like Scotch prayer, do you? It’s so stout and strong—full in the mouth, hey? Let Glasgow once set to praying, and your chance of harming that girl isn’t worth twopence. Ah! I knew the mere mention of Glasgow would drive you out,” and Miss Lindsay started up. “Harm her if you dare!” she cried defiantly, by way of a parting shot at her routed foe.

Whatever form it took, Miss Lindsay's love was at least no dead thing. It went and *lived* in the heart of Mabel Smith.

There were many beautiful and touching episodes, deeply edifying withal, connected with Mabel's marriage. Not that very much interest was felt in the bride; the great interest of the occasion centered in the invalid. Jacob had resolved to do the thing "handsome," and do it he did. The *trousseau* was exhibited in the little parlour, and many metaphorical ladies attended to see the sight. They also contributed their little offerings,—chiefly "Bogatzky's Golden Treasury," of which a large store gradually accumulated. The lovely wedding dress, rich white corded silk, with Honiton lace veil and trimmings, rested, with due muslin coverings, of course, on the high-backed school chair which used to rack poor Mabel's back, strong and healthy as it was, when she was a child. This chair and its precious burden stood close to Mary's couch. The travelling dress, also, rich brown silk

with full velvet trimmings, was on view, and other dresses—dinner, not ball, of course, which would have been carnal. Then there was a lovely dressing-case, with engine-turned silver tops, engraved “M. V.” as a monogram; a costly massive bracelet, and other expensive jewels.

Oh, but to see the poor invalid look so bright and cheerful, that was indeed the lovely edifying sight. Mabel, on the contrary, was suffering from a bad headache—at least that was the excuse Mrs. Smith offered for her absence; she had, in fact, locked herself into the little room upstairs, and she lay grovelling on the floor, with the buzz of voices below her, fighting hopelessly with the horror that filled her soul.

“And does not poor dear Mary repine,” whispered the metaphorical ladies, with tender concern, to Mrs. Smith, “when she sees all these creatures of dross and earthly vanity, which contrast so sadly with her poor afflicted state?”

“Oh no,” answered Mrs. Smith, with a

mother's pride, and yet with tears in her eyes. "Ask the blessed one what she feels."

They asked her :

"Do not these carnal things," they said (they mostly wore sealskin jackets, and some of the jackets were trimmed with real sable), "do not these carnal things make you repine and fret at your sad earthly lot?"

"Oh no," replied the invalid with cheerful alacrity. "I rejoice in these poor worldly things for dear Mabel's sake. I love to look at them because they are for her happiness; but as for me, I have a casket of precious jewels."

"The pearl without price?" asked the ladies anxiously. (Many of them possessed diamonds for evening wear, and they wore them.)

"Yes," answered the invalid. "I humbly trust that I do possess that priceless jewel;" and her countenance beamed with joyful expression, but the ladies and Mrs. Smith averted their faces to conceal their tears.

The crowning sweetness of all was the demeanour of the invalid throughout the wedding-day. So cheerful, and yet so soberly and religiously cheerful, and, at the same time, so wonderfully resigned. Mabel looked very handsome, it is true, and the wedding dress became her well, but her countenance was hard and stony, and her eyes were almost disfigured by a fixed cold stare. She went through the religious ceremony like a sleepwalker. Bystanders said she evidently had no heart—a worldly, mercenary girl, to have accepted such a match, and her character was written clearly enough in her face.

Of course Miss Lindsay had not been asked to the wedding; she did not even attend the ceremony at the church. Mabel had furtively cast her eyes around to see if she were present, but Miss Lindsay did not dare trust herself, and therefore prudently remained at home. The invalid had requested to see her sister alone as soon as she returned from the church, and Mabel entered the room in all her wedding finery.

Through some mistake—and the little house was inconveniently crowded—several of the guests strayed into the room after Mabel.

“Dear, precious Mabel,” cried the invalid, clasping her sister’s hand, and kissing it fervently, “I have been praying for you all the time you were at church. I have been present with you in the spirit. Oh, darling! you are now the wife of a rich man. Riches bring their own temptation. Let us try to remember that these things are but vanity of spirit—that the soul is more precious than the vile body, and the spirit than much gold.” She spoke very fluently, but in the presence of so many guests gathered round her couch, she modestly refused to continue her exhortation. Mabel listened to it all with the fixed stony expression, and people greatly marvelled at her hardness of heart.

There was a very handsome breakfast, plenty of champagne, for Jacob had resolved that the thing should be well done—of course the Smiths could not have afforded such an entertainment. The health of the bride

and bridegroom was duly drunk. The clergyman who had performed the marriage ceremony suddenly exclaimed, "Let us pray," and accordingly the company proceeded to prayer, falling on their knees round the table, and praying over a *débris* of broken French rolls and a littering of jelly and blancmange and half-emptied champagne glasses. The prayer offered was full of unction, and very comforting to the great majority present, but the heart of Mabel was like a glowing coal—a sense of unutterable shame weighed upon her. The clergyman prayed that long life might be granted to the married pair, and Mabel prayed for speedy death.

At last it was time for Mabel to prepare for the journey. She retired to her little room, followed by the servant-girl. The excitement of the day had been too much for the nerves of the poor invalid, and Mrs. Smith was forced to remain with her afflicted daughter. Mabel flung off her wedding dress; she suddenly told the maid that she

must see her mother; she could endure the torture of silence no longer; speak she must, she had terrible words to utter—she had not dared to confess her feelings to her sister—she felt that she was as much degraded as the vilest of her sex; that gloss it as she might, she had sold her youth and beauty for gold. Mrs. Smith hurried into the room in a state of great excitement. “She was so sorry she couldn’t stay a moment, poor Mary was evidently giving way.”

“Listen to me, mother,” cried Mabel in her agony. “I, too, am your daughter.”

Mrs. Smith was terrified by the expression of Mabel’s face, and she was constrained to remain. Suddenly there was a cry downstairs for Mrs. Smith, and the maid burst into the room almost breathless. “Please, ma’am, Miss Mary——” and Mrs. Smith flew downstairs at the first note of alarm.

“Please, Miss Mabel,” said the maid, “Mr. Vaughan says it’s time to start.”

“I shall be ready directly,” answered

Mabel; "go!" and she huddled on the fine travelling costume.

"Mabel, dearest," cried Mr. Vaughan from the foot of the stairs, "are you nearly ready?"

She shuddered at his voice—she scarcely knew what she was doing; she suddenly seized a pair of long scissors which lay in a sheath on the dressing-table, and hid them in her bosom. Her brain whirled with pain, she staggered downstairs; Jacob met her and supported her on his arm. There were many kisses given and warm farewells, but she still retained the hard stony glance. Her father led her to the carriage. "Margaret Lindsay," she murmured, "I want you." There was a sudden bustle and a stir—sundry little boys who were crowding in curiosity round the carriage were brushed aside—and Miss Lindsay's gaunt figure bent into the carriage, she caught Mabel in her arms and kissed her, but not one word did she vouchsafe, and she vanished with the suddenness of her appearance.

Mabel burst into tears. By accident, in stooping forward, the scissors fell down. Amid a shower of rice and satin shoes the carriage drove away.

“Why, Mabel darling,” cried Jacob, picking up the scissors, “they must have fallen from the travelling-bag.” He gave them to her. She took them from his hand with a shudder, and placed them in the bag. She shrank away from him, she could not dissemble her terror and abhorrence when he approached her; but it was the hour of his triumph—the triumph of his gold over youth and beauty. He laughed at her reluctance and her terror, for he knew he held the girl in his power. Again she prayed for death, but she let him the while press her hand at his will, and clasp her waist as they drove to the station.

After the departure of the married pair, as soon as Mary had sufficiently recovered from her fainting-fit, they had the exceeding comfort of another prayer. It was really almost too sweetly affecting for many

of the persons present, so very beautiful and apt was the reference which the clergyman made to the wise virgins with oil in their lamps. The discourse clearly pointed to the invalid, who had been undoubtedly the heroine of the marriage festival.

“Dearest girl,” asked the metaphorical ladies with the tenderest concern, “oh, tell us! Have you a lamp? do you possess any oil?”

“Both lamp and oil, so I humbly trust,” she answered in a low but steadfast voice, and her head sank back in exhaustion on the couch. It was very lovely to look at her pale face lighted by the bright smile of faith.

Indeed, all agreed that it was a most edifying occasion—that nothing could be more marked than the blessed spirituality of the one sister, and the hard worldliness of the other. Even the waiter, at 7s. 6d. for the breakfast and afternoon (he was due in the evening at a dinner, and afterwards at a ball supper, and was therefore

a man engrossed by worldly affairs), was deeply affected as he stood in the passage seeking for Mammon at the hands of retiring guests. "Not that I hold with your fruity champagnes at a low figure," said he, "and the company was more for tracts than shillings, but I'm blessed if the praying wasn't that beautiful that the very air seemed full of cherubs like, as I leaned agen the 'ballisters' with the parlour door ajar, because the room was that stuffy."

As the guests were departing, the clergyman, full of spiritual buoyancy, announced his intention of calling on Miss Lindsay (his first pastoral visit) during the afternoon. "You'll find her a very peculiar person," they all said.

The clergyman did call, and he did find Miss Lindsay a very peculiar person. Of course, he talked about the wedding—his language was very round and smooth—and Miss Lindsay grew very irritable and jerky; he also alluded to the blessed manifestation of spiritual life which he had just witnessed.

Miss Lindsay grew still more irritable, used her favourite word "fiddlesticks" very often, and finally called him a fool to his face, whereat he retired, greatly discomfited, probably for the first time in his life; but he was by no means the first person, clerical or lay, that Miss Lindsay had discomfited by excessively plain speaking.

Miss Lindsay retired to her room that evening in a very angry mood; she usually laid the Bible open before her on the dressing-table while she brushed her long back hair. Her enemies always had a very hot time of it during this process; what she felt she felt, and what she felt she said; entanglement by comb was a very special source of invective, and her arch-enemy was particularly liable to fare badly at this period of her toilet; this evening she was especially irate against him.

"Why can't you show yourself, you despicable coward, instead of twisting and wriggling about in the dark? Why, be-

cause you don't dare! You haven't dared to show your ugly face since brave old Martin—glorious old Martin—flung his ink-stand at your head. I'm only a woman, though; he was a big man, he could thunder out a psalm at you. I can't, with my croaky voice. Why don't you try to frighten me? Ah! but Margaret wears the good armour, tried and true, and she comes of a fighting family, does Margaret—you know that well enough, you cur; you know my blessed father and my uncle Harry sleep at Chillianwallah. Cold steel, hey? When old Gough gave the word, and they fell leading their men; and my brother Bob—my bright-eyed noble Bob, my darling Bob!—he died by the side of God's saint and soldier, Havelock—that's why you daren't face Margaret. And that girl—Heaven help her, I can't! I daren't even think about her, and I'm not going to tell lies to God—that girl, I say, you wouldn't have dared to assail her face to face, so you are going to attack her, mean scoundrel as you

are, through the very lines of her goodness, and her generosity, and her self-devotion, and her constancy. Ah! you can't hide your mean dodges from me. You've puffed up the poor souls of those around her with spiritual pride—you know I'm no match for you at that game—sheep, as well as shepherd; that miserable blatant bag of windy words that came maundering here to-day—he won't come a second time, I'll warrant! Yes, you've dragged that girl to degradation through the spirit of self-sacrifice, and you are going to tempt her to destruction through her love and her constancy; you are going to warp in her the sense of right and wrong; you mean to bring that lover home at some accursed moment and fling him in her way. That's your vile wretched game, you crawling beast. Margaret's no fool, she can see in the dark, recollect—but Margaret's to the fore—Glasgow, and the 'Brazen Vessel!' and we mean one and all to fight for Mabel's soul!"

CHAPTER II.

MABEL'S HONEYMOON.

MABEL learnt the greatness of her crime in that drive from her father's house to the railway-station—the horror of her position utterly overcame her. She felt she had sold herself for the man's gold, but she had not been able to cast off her sense of shame—degraded, yet lacking shamelessness to lull the dishonour. Self-sacrifice, whither had it led her? Better have been selfish and clung to honour than endure this fearful abasement for the sake of others; and so there fell upon her that saddest of all trials which beset the human heart—the dark hour when good turns into evil, and the clear waters run with blood.

“If it must be so, make me vile,” she cried, in the agony of her soul; “efface my womanhood by degradation. I have committed a great sin, make me also a great sinner—I shall go mad else;” and through her fevered brain flashed thoughts of suicide in divers manners, and she eagerly canvassed each desperate suggestion as it flew before her. And all this time he held her hand clasped fondly in his, and revelled in his victory.

They arrived at the station; a *coupé* had been “engaged” for the newly-married pair. He led her triumphantly along the platform; she with downcast eyes and hard-set face. On the theory of probable largess, there was a certain ceremony of fussy attendance on the part of guards and porters which sufficiently stamped the old man and young woman as bride and bridegroom. On a railway platform, the many pilgrims of life’s journey halt awhile and stand together—strange jumble of divergent feelings within the compass of a limited area! Saints and

sinners, cynics and worldlings, brave young hearts full of noble enthusiasm, and old hearts true to the core—to one and all, bride and bridegroom possessed some interest more or less. The saints condemned, the sinners rejoiced vindictively, the cynics smiled, the worldlings, in the thought of Mammon, realized the situation, but the brave young hearts sorrowed; the young women, who had defied poverty for true love's sake, pitied the miserable bride. In the holiness of their love, they could fathom the horror of a loveless union—aye, and there were other women who rejoiced as they gazed, with hard, scornful gaze, at the bride; she, too, had sold herself, for all the consecration of her shame by holy rite and ring.

It seemed to Mabel, in the strange excitement of her brain, as if she could see into the minds of the bystanders and read their damning thoughts. She was conducted to the *coupé*; she started back in horror. If she entered that compart-

ment, she would be alone with this man for the whole journey; she could not endure that revolting thought.

“I hate a *coupé*. Another carriage!” she exclaimed; “I can’t bear the draught.”

It was useless for Jacob to protest with so many curious bystanders gathered round. She entered, by hazard, another carriage,—any carriage, so that there were other passengers in it.

As the train started, there were signs of significant derision in the crowd; but the young women, who pitied her, uttered a silent prayer on her behalf. Jacob was angry and provoked, and after arranging the wraps and bags, sat sulkily at her side, without speaking. There were two other passengers in the carriage, a young man and a young woman, evidently husband and wife. Mabel’s chief anxiety at first was to discover whether these people were going the whole journey. To this end, her ears strove to catch their talk; but little by little she grew absorbed in their happi-

ness ; she could see the holy cord of love and sympathy which bound them together, and she felt, with dismay, that the cord of her love stretched far away across land and ocean to the first and only love of her life—that he and she were truly man and wife—that the marriage ceremony of the morning had put asunder those whom God had joined together. At last, by some accident, a remark was made which presently grew into a conversation. The young woman, who was very sweet and charming, seemed anxious to descend from her own region of happiness and strive with sympathy to cheer Mabel's heart. She said but little, but Mabel felt she meant much, and she blessed her for her kindness. Unfortunately, these pleasant passengers were only going half-way on the destined journey to the Lakes. To Mabel's dismay, they descended from the carriage at a wayside station, and the young wife bid Mabel a tender adieu. The last time Mabel saw them, they were standing together on the

platform, she leaning on his arm, and tears were in her eyes as she waved a farewell to the departing train.

She was alone now with this man in the carriage—her husband! But there was nothing in her heart to assure her that he was her husband. Truly, there had been a wedding ceremony that morning, but it had become dwarfed to an insignificant recollection. It was incredible that *words* could make that man her husband. Ay, and her signature! It was incredible that pen and ink could make her his wife. There seemed, in her unbalanced mind, to be no relation between a form of words and marriage. Impossible! The man she was with could not be her husband.

Jacob had by this time forgotten his sulky fit, and forgiven the affair of the *coupé*; he was gracious once more.

“Come, Mabel,” he exclaimed, “give me a kiss, and make it up.” He approached her; she shrank away from him into the corner of the carriage, with a shudder.

“Nonsense!” he exclaimed, with rising anger. “Give me a kiss directly.”

She made no answer. He threw himself back into his seat. He had resolved to make her his slave—resolved to domineer over her as his sister had done, and he was determined to commence his course of training forthwith.

“You married me,” he said, “not for love—I know that well enough—but you had a purpose.”

“I had,” she answered, facing him with desperation; the moment had come for speaking the truth without stint. “I married you because I loved *them*—because they were poor, and I could scarcely find them bread. I knew that women have married for money, or rank, and not for love. I knew that women have endured the degradation of marriage without love—then why not I, if I could procure comforts for them? I thought that I could endure this shame; but I can’t. I thought that I could be your slave—I could be that; but your wife, never.”

“Why not have thought of all this before?” he asked in astonishment at the terrible frankness of her avowal.

“Because I had believed I was more despicable than I am. I meant when I married—I honestly meant—to accept the position, even if I died in the effort; but I can’t——”

“And if I say that they shan’t enjoy one penny of my money, what then?” he exclaimed vindictively.

“Heaven must help them,” she answered. “I can’t help them at the price of my shame.”

“Shame!” he exclaimed, losing all control; “shame! why, you are my wife.”

“No, never, as long as I live!”

“Married this very day!”

“Words, words,” she answered bitterly; “man’s doing, not God’s. I have done an accursed thing; I know that. God help me.”

“Ah, my fine lady! but you are my wife,” he exclaimed triumphantly. “You

must be tamed; taught obedience. Kiss you I will—it is my right; you are mine, irrevocably mine,” and with angry resolution he once more approached her. Again she drew back from him, crouching in the corner of the carriage—all thought of the marriage ceremony was blotted out of her mind—all recollection that he did possess a husband’s right was effaced; it seemed as if some stranger were offering her a shameful insult. She covered her face with her hands tight clasped. “Look you!” he cried in bated breath, and well-nigh foaming at the mouth with rage, “my house, bed, and board, or a beggar outside my door.”

“A beggar,” she answered back defiantly.

“Ay, and they shall be beggars too,” he continued. “They shall live on in their narrow poverty; they shall cast their reproaches on that woman, daughter and sister; that wife, who has forgotten a wife’s duties, and called a wife’s honour shame. Mind, I can love or I can hate.”

“Hate, hate,” she retorted bitterly; not love, that accursed thought.

“What, marry an old man for his money-bags, hey? Ah! but he was too sharp, my dainty lady. Your future depends on your good behaviour—*their* future, too, on your good behaviour. Ah! ah! the villa at Torquay. I shall let it! That allowance of money, which would have made all things smooth and easy. I shall keep it at my bankers. Think well of all these things.”

She was silent beneath his threats. Presently she burst into tears. Alas! it was but too true; he had full power to give effect to his threats—full power to render her sacrifice vain. He thought her tears meant submission—at least they proved the power of his word. He loved her in his strange, morbid love, and her tears had a special allurements in his eyes. He felt very proud of her too—proud of her fine spirit; he exulted in the thought that the strong web of his own weaving was woven round the haughty girl; and there was sweet

triumph, too, in the thought that he had wrested her from another man—his possession by the strong bond of law, human and divine. The past fracas was only part and parcel of the taming process. He changed his position, and took the seat next to her.

“You foolish girl!” he cried. “You frightened child! I’m full of kindness. I want to make you happy, give you all you want or wish. I want to do all I can for them, only I must have a little love.” He maundered on awhile, she listening to him with palpitating heart. Thus emboldened, he clasped her hand in his—her husband truly by marriage rite; but he seemed to her, in the agony of her feelings, which warped facts as well as judgment, to be some vile wretch who was trying to lure her with base offers from her husband—that man far away in eastern land, her rightful husband in the sight of God.

Again he attempted to kiss her, to draw his arm round her waist. Sacrilege! With that thought of her lover strong in her

mind, she started up, and strove to thrust away his arm. They struggled together. He was furious, mad with rage. But her strength outmatched his; and, half through her strength, half through a sudden jerk of the train, he fell down on the floor of the carriage.

She was breathless, but uninjured in her young strength, though her heart beat with almost audible beats. "He will rise with renewed fury," she thought; and for the moment she proposed with mad desperation to fling herself out of the carriage. Her hand was on the window; she turned in terror.

But, good God! he did not attempt to move. What was it? What did it mean? She had been prepared for curses, but he did not speak. He only groaned, and breathed with painful, gasping breath. A great horror filled her soul—she sank down on her knees. "Oh, my God! what have I done?" she cried in her exceeding terror. "Spare him or kill me; if he dies, don't let

me live—my husband in sickness and in health—my husband by plighted troth. I've sworn it; those words were in my mouth this very day. Oh, my God! is it possible I can have killed him? Is this the curse of Cain?" she groaned in agony. "Has that awful crime fallen on my head? red hands, and yet a bride!" Fearful visions flew before her eyes; the nightmare vision of an embodied horror clung round her with relentless persistence; she struggled up, almost mechanically, to reach her travelling-bag in the netting to procure brandy and smelling-salts, but she staggered forward, stumbled, and fell down insensible at her husband's feet.

CHAPTER III.

THE ENEMY ACCEPTS THE CHALLENGE.

It really was a very charming villa at Torquay which Jacob Vaughan had selected for his wife's family: good, plain, substantial, comfortable furniture, without one atom of vain show or pomp—just the description of furniture fit for people whose thoughts were set on the Heavenly Sion. The chintz, too, which Mabel had chosen was excessively pretty—simple, at the same time cheerful, but unpretending.

The drawing-room, a bright, pleasant apartment, opened with bow-windows into a small garden which commanded a lovely sea view, Berry Head, in the distance.

There was a steep descent to the shore, covered with pine growth, through which the sea was visible in the breaks of the foliage. Mary Smith, when she was well enough to be carried into the garden, loved to gaze down upon the restless ocean; and the ocean, the ships, the little boats, and the fish of various sorts, afforded her the material for many very lovely and touching metaphors. Nor were the earthly creatures of nourishing and even dainty food denied to this marine paradise; these earthly blessings were duly delivered every mid-day through the appointed channels for their conveyance, namely, tradesmen's carts, which called regularly for orders in the morning; Jacob Vaughan paying the bills quarterly.

So they blessed the day when Mabel became the wife of Mr. Vaughan, and they beheld the hand of Providence working mysteriously through the medium of this marriage for their worldly comfort and great temporal solace. They were indeed deeply

grateful for the blessings conferred upon them, and if they thought less about Mabel than mere worldlings might consider natural, they thought all the more about the Great Source whence all these carnal blessings had flowed; and they most certainly did not fall into the common error of confounding the worldly instrument of their happiness with the First Great Cause of all temporal and eternal good. They were indeed almost nervously anxious to be theologically correct on this all-important point. "We must strive to remember," said Mary, emphatically—and her parents regarded her as an oracle—"that our gratitude is not due to a mere secondary cause; Heaven forbid! Much as we owe to Mabel's kindness, speaking carnally, we owe nothing to her in comparison with the gratitude we owe to Heaven."

The pastor who ministered spiritually to the Smith family at Torquay, a man of thoroughly sound doctrinal views, was deeply impressed with the correctness of

Mary's theology, and even astounded at the clearness of her expositions of sacred truth. "Truly, my dear young lady," he answered, "it is far better to err in forgetting the earthly instrument, than to fall into the grievous sin of forgetting the heavenly origin;" and so in the fear of sin, Mabel's devotion was well-nigh overlooked.

"And your sister, Mrs. Vaughan," inquired the worthy pastor, with sympathetic interest, "I trust that she too has received a full measure, yea, heaped up, of gospel grace?"

"Dear, good, kind Mabel!" answered Mary, with tears in her eyes—and she would not trust herself to make a direct reply—"we must hope, and pray earnestly, and humbly trust—poor dear, about a year ago she became the wife of a very rich man, and we all know how carnal riches tend to choke up our sinful hearts; but the Lord has dealt very mercifully with her. Viewed with merely worldly eyes, her marriage from the very commencement was very sad.

Her worthy husband was afflicted with a paralytic seizure on their wedding journey, and from that moment she became his nurse; nothing, I am sure, can exceed her devoted attention. Of course, at the very first, we were dreadfully shocked, and could only behold the sadness of the event; but every day shows us more and more its sanctifying blessedness, and I am glad to say we are now able to regard it in the light of a wondrous blessing. Dear Mabel has been mercifully saved from a career of worldliness; Mr. Vaughan, whose heart, I fear, was full of the old Adam, has been awakened to a sense of sin; and the great and terrible uncertainty of all human plans and hopes has been brought directly home to us all, for our great profit and advantage, through this blessed visitation."

The Rev. Mr. Simeon (such was the name of the worthy pastor) was visibly affected to tears by the truly scriptural tone of Mary's words. They asked him to stay to dinner, and he stayed—a plain dinner,

they said apologetically; and he answered graciously, making scriptural reference to ox and herb. And a pleasant savour of roastings was wafted kitchenwise as the neat maid entered, tray in hand, to lay the cloth—and that savour was an effective condemnation of the apology. It was in truth a dinner of great inward comfort, although entirely divested of mere worldly display; a nice large Torbay sole, delicately boiled, with plain melted butter (Burgess's anchovy could be added at pleasure), made to perfection, as melted butter is seldom made. This was followed by a loin of early lamb with the kidney, roasted to a turn, and early asparagus; and Mr. Simeon liked both these creatures. Nice new potatoes, too, mealy young things, served smoking hot in the whitest of all damask; and a custard pudding, almost as well made as the pudding Mabel made with a breaking heart. Finally, a lovely cream cheese, rich with all the richness of Devonshire pastures. A full, yet duly matured, port; and Mr. Simeon

enjoyed a generous wine. When the eyes were raised above these creature comforts, there was Berry Head in the distance, and the full sweep of the bay lighted by the setting sun, with the Brixham fishing fleet in the offing. And Mary, with the rays of light flushing her pale face, talked very, very sweetly, and yet withal in a modest, unpretending, simple manner, about the sun, and the boats, and the fish, and she showed that these things were mercifully intended to be examples to us all, as much to the simplest as to the wisest. And she was never tired of talking in this sweet strain, nor were her parents of listening; and if Mr. Simeon closed his eyes for a minute or so, it was because the sun dazzled them, and it was moreover his wont to take a short nap after dinner; though, in truth, Mrs. Smith marvelled at his somnolence.

It was manifestly needful to say something gracious in recognition of such a thoroughly adequate dinner, and Mr. Simeon said it in the blindest manner,

making use of two distinct figures of speech as he lingered in the hall bidding adieu to Mrs. Smith. "Verily, my dear lady, a feast of fat things, as well as a feast of edification. Your blessed daughter is a monition to the best of us. So young (figure the first, marine), and yet already laid up in ordinary, having weathered the storms of life; so lovely in spirit (figure the second, commerce), like a precious jewel cased in cotton wool." Mrs. Smith loved to hear such speeches; and if she did not quite understand the relevancy of the images, perhaps the charm of a metaphor is augmented by its irrelevance.

"May we all possess that precious wool," continued Mr. Simeon solemnly, "finest jeweller's wool carded by the teeth of tribulation;" and so saying he departed. All this was very comforting to Mrs. Smith; it was her dearest ambition—only ambition is a sinful word; her dearest hope, then—to be the mother of a saint. "Stiff Collars," indeed—the words still rankled in her soul

—“Stiff Collars ; or, Don't be Stuck up,” stood hatefully in the chambers of her memory, like Mordecai sitting at the king's gate ; but notwithstanding Miss Lindsay's cruel scoff, the saintship of Mary seemed assured. Mrs. Smith returned to the parlour. Mr. Smith was engaged in the comfortable doze of mental peace and digestive equilibrium, but Mary's eyes were filled with tears.

“My darling !” exclaimed Mrs. Smith, with tender solicitude.

“Oh, mother,” answered Mary with fervour, “we must pray very earnestly for dear Mabel's conversion, so that she may be vouchsafed the blessing of everlasting peace.”

Most assuredly Mary Smith was not a hypocrite. The formula of faith which she possessed was quite sufficient for her nature, because morally and physically she needed little ; but Mabel wanted far more, with her larger soul and healthy body. Easy enough to fashion saints out of thin materials, small

brains, and weak bodies, ascetics of the cloister or the front parlour; more difficult out of large brains and larger bodies, flung into the vortex of the world, and subject to the domination of earthly laws.

There would have been easy saintship for Mabel if she could have been dwarfed to the dimensions of her sister; but she was gifted with grand qualities of soul, and she was destined to be tried and tempted, not through the meanness of her nature, but through its excellence—the good was to be turned into evil, and the evil was to become good. Accepting for the nonce Miss Lindsay's faith in an embodiment of evil, it would be manifest to the devil's brain that such a woman would be proof against all low, mean temptation; it would be necessary to tempt her through her virtues. Constancy is a great virtue; then turn constancy into a sin. Self-sacrifice is the greatest virtue; then make self-sacrifice a crime, and leave the dire perplexities of soul to be dealt with by a highly-trained

and sensitive conscience, and a large, loving heart.

Jacob Vaughan had been sorely stricken in body; he was, in truth, almost as helpless an invalid as Mary Smith, requiring to be carried or wheeled about from place to place. A dark cloud of remorse rested on Mabel's brow; she felt, rightly or wrongly, that the terrible affliction which had befallen him was her work; she had been guilty of a great crime, though Heaven had mercifully averted the crime of murder from her head, and had left her the power of expiation.

At the commencement of his attack he displayed the greatest aversion towards her, cursed her bitterly when she entered his presence. It was a terrible ordeal; her own heart was burning with the desire of reparation. "I am ready to be his slave," she cried in her prayer to heaven; "in mercy give me some favour in his sight; let him only tolerate me as a hired nurse." It was a long struggle, but her devotion and

tenderness won their way at last. In his selfishness, Jacob Vaughan discovered that he did really possess a slave in the woman he had married, that she was ready to bear all his infirmities of temper with loving submission, while hirelings turned away even from his gold. Heaven only knew how much she endured, for she never whispered a word to a living soul, but she bore it without repining; nay, the very burden was a solace to her sad conscience.

Not only had she to suffer much from her husband's irritable temper, but she had also to endure the hatred and jealousy of his family. Of course they never could forgive her marriage. They used to gather round the couch of the invalid with profuse expressions of condolence and sympathy, and they sought convenient occasion to cast insidious doubts on the sincerity of her devotion. It was easy enough, said Mrs. Corley openly to her brother, to see the motive for a young wife's attention to an old and wealthy husband. Mabel was aware that cruel things

were said of her; the jealousy of Mr. and Mrs. Corley was plain to all eyes. She endeavoured to live down the injustice—to vanquish the calumny by, if possible, increased zeal and tenderness. But at last, in an evil moment, she was provoked beyond endurance. Jacob, in a fit of petulance, taxed her in the presence of Mrs. Corley with mercenary motives. She was trying to get the old man's money into her grasp. If Mrs. Corley had not been present, she would have fallen on her knees and striven with earnest protest to combat the hard words; but her woman's temper was provoked beyond endurance. She turned on Mrs. Corley with all her latent power, the strength of which Jacob knew too well, and with a few sharp words she administered a scathing rebuke to Mrs. Corley.

“You have placed a lie between me and my husband; you have poisoned the very air between us. I have endured very much, and endured it gladly—a burden which I

have borne in tenderness and love—and he knows it. Henceforth you shall take that burden on yourself; you shall be his nurse; you may take that accursed gold, which, God knows, I have never sought, and for which I have never served.”

“Mighty fine talking!” said Mrs. Corley, growing alarmed.

“More than talking,” answered Mabel, “acting! Henceforth you are my husband’s nurse; I am a stranger in this house. He may leave me a beggar—I’ll never ask for one penny of his wealth.” Overmastered by the strength of her indignation, she turned to leave the room.

“Mercy me! hoity-toity!” cried Mrs. Corley, scarcely knowing what course to take, and in great dismay at the course things were taking.

“Silence, Maria!” exclaimed Jacob, with emphasis. He also was becoming alarmed; he knew what comfort Mabel really was to him.

“Mabel,” he murmured in a low tone.

She stopped with her hand on the door. In a moment, the terror of that scene in the railway carriage flashed into her mind, awakening horror and remorse. She turned back in terror, and threw herself on her knees at her husband's side. "God forgive me! I will never leave you—never, call me what you will—mercenary, heartless, base. I am your wife, I will never leave your side—never, never!"

From that moment she won the old man's heart. There was something in the power of her voice which stirred him, and perhaps something more in the thought of the scant gratitude with which he had repaid her devotion; in any event, Mrs. Corley's wicked and clumsy efforts to regain lost ground in her brother's affections were defeated.

It was not a noble love that Jacob gave to Mabel. The seeds, whether of wheat or of tares, that were sown in such a nature could only result in a stunted growth: mean and petty in good, as well as mean and

petty in evil. Such were the limitations of Jacob Vaughan's nature.

The idea of *quid pro quo* had ruled Jacob Vaughan's life. He could understand service for wages, but not service for love; and being now determined that Mabel should love him, he sought to buy her love. "Only let her be good to him now, and she should possess the old man's money another day, every penny." The words brought a blush of shame to her face, they branded her with meanness; she protested vehemently against the injustice of such a disposition of his property. "Every penny," he answered doggedly; and he summoned his solicitor, Mr. Barton, to his sofa-side. This gentleman had long been Jacob's legal adviser, and he was really a gentleman in all true senses of the word. Jacob directed him to draft a will bequeathing all his property to his wife, Mabel Vaughan. Mr. Barton, on his part, entered a solemn protest against this instruction, holding that he had a moral as well as a professional duty to

perform, and he pointed out in forcible language the injustice of such a disposition ; but it was all in vain.

Mr. Barton, somewhat sternly, addressed a protest to Mabel, as if believing her to be the evil counsellor (Mabel had been compelled by her husband, sorely against her will, to remain in the room during the interview). It was exquisitely painful that a stranger should believe her capable of a mercenary intrigue. As far as she dared to speak, she supported the objections of Mr. Barton ; but Jacob silenced her in his dogged, obstinate manner. The original directions were peremptorily enforced, and Mr. Barton with some ill grace left the room, followed by Mabel. She did not dare to be absent very long, so great was the jealousy and suspicion of Jacob at her absence. "For God's sake," she whispered to Mr. Barton, "don't believe that this is my doing. I am not a miserable adventuress seeking my own profit. I solemnly swear to you, let the will be drawn as it may, I will not, if I out-

live my husband, take one shilling more than you consider my due." Up to this time Mr. Barton had entertained the worst possible opinion of Mabel's character ; but the earnestness of her voice struck him. "Heaven knows," she continued sorrowfully, "I have a hard task to perform, but it is too sad that good and honourable people should consider me mean and base."

From that moment Mr. Barton began to believe in her, and with dawning belief came pity ; his countenance lost its sternness. He was not a man of many words. "I believe what you say," he answered, and he grasped her hand with a heartfelt grasp. "Good-bye ;" and Mabel returned to her husband's room comforted. "And yet," argued Mr. Barton, when he had left the house, "she must have married Jacob for the sake of his money ;" but he did not know till after-days that she had married for the sake of others, and not for herself.

Day by day, Jacob's love grew less endurable. In his invalid state, he was, of

course, unable to receive or entertain company, but it was his fancy that Mabel should wear fine dresses, and deck herself with jewelry. He ordered silk and satin dresses with costly trimmings of lace. It was in vain for her to protest; he would have the things worn. Jacob was possessed of several valuable diamond ornaments, which in the course of business he had accepted in lieu of money payments; he insisted upon giving her these valuable trinkets from time to time. "I don't desire them," she would answer with a sigh, but he insisted on fastening the glittering earring in her ear, and clasping the necklet round her throat.

"There's five hundred pounds' worth," he said boastfully.

"For Heaven's sake don't give me these expensive jewels," she protested; "it makes them say such wicked things about me."

"They are yours—yours," he answered with a chuckle. "You look so handsome in them—a queen—my queen! It is my

pleasure to see you splendidly dressed." And other costly gifts did he heap upon her—India shawls, fine lace, and rich furs. Some women would have gladly accepted the situation; if they could not have loved the man, there was at least avarice for consolation.

Curses, slavery, body and soul worn out in devotion to duty, Mabel could have endured all that without flinching, and she had endured it; but Jacob's love was a terrible burden, because it awoke the recollections of old love in her bosom, and then the contempt she felt for herself was insupportable. Amid all her perplexities of soul, Miss Lindsay was the one consolation of her life; she could pour forth, if not all, at least a great portion of her sorrows to that lady. Her first interview had taught her that, beneath great surface eccentricity, and even *brusquerie*, lay a brave, true, and merciful heart; and Miss Lindsay's first impression of Mabel had been confirmed—only, by the way, Miss Lindsay's faith never required

confirmation—by all that had subsequently passed between them.

In addition to personal predilection, Mabel possessed the deepest interest for Miss Lindsay, an interest which had increased from the moment she had been compelled to close her wallet utterly non-plussed. Hitherto it had been Miss Lindsay's mission to exchange straightforward sledge-hammer blows with her invisible antagonist—sin was sin, therefore knock it down, and she had knocked it down with great success; but she now felt that the sledge-hammer was useless, that her wily opponent had changed his weapons—that recourse must be had to skilled fencing with highly-tempered foils. Miss Lindsay, as a matter of taste, preferred the sledge-hammer, with its broad, swinging freedom; nevertheless she grasped the new weapon with thorough zest, though with a sense of diffidence as to her skill in its use.

“Why was I told that human nature was inconstant, fickle, shallow, desperately

false?" asked Mabel mournfully one day when they were together; "why was this faith drilled into me till I believed it?"

"Because it is the truth," answered Miss Lindsay decisively.

"It isn't," retorted Mabel; "I only wish it were."

"It is the truth," persisted Miss Lindsay. "Unregenerated human nature is desperately false, and fickle, and shallow."

"Do you think my nature is regenerate?" asked Mabel.

"Certainly not!" answered Miss Lindsay authoritatively.

"Then that faith isn't true," replied Mabel with emphasis, "or I shouldn't be tortured like this—I should have forgotten that lover long ago."

"Hush, Mabel!" exclaimed Miss Lindsay, glancing around nervously; "he will hear you."

"Who?" asked Mabel, with some surprise, for they were alone.

"He's always listening," was the answer

in an undertone, and Mabel understood to whom Miss Lindsay referred.

“Let him listen,” she exclaimed with desperation; “I don’t care. I knew that women had been false in love ere this—had married for money—had lived through it all—had had children; then why not I? I’m not regenerate; why can’t I be fickle, and shallow, and inconstant?”

“Hush!” cried Miss Lindsay, terrified at Mabel’s words; “this is the devil’s work!”

“No!” exclaimed Mabel vehemently.

“He puts the thought of that man into your soul.”

“No!” reiterated Mabel, in sharp protest, “not the devil; God’s doing. God made me true and constant. They made me believe I was low, and mean, and contemptible. I thought I could be false, and yet not feel ashamed, at least just after a bit—just after the first dash of shame. Not the devil,” she murmured, “God, God;” and she clasped her hands over her face.

“You must pray,” said Miss Lindsay; “that’s the remedy—pray earnestly.”

“Pray,” echoed Mabel desperately; “pray, what for?—pray to be inconstant—pray to forget the noblest thoughts of my life, for all my best thoughts were woven round his life. When I try to pray, it drives me mad. Every word I utter is a lie. God had made me true and constant, I say; God had given me a great and holy love—God help me. They said it was the devil’s doing; and now, because I believed in that accursed blunder, I must pray to God to undo all His good work—to make me false and contemptible! I’ll suffer any torture before I pray for that.”

Miss Lindsay was silent for the second time in her life.

Mabel, in quick revulsion of feeling, grew half terrified at the length to which the vehemence of her feelings had carried her. When she looked up, she saw the tears in Miss Lindsay’s eyes. Touched to the heart, she rose from her chair, and, throwing her

arms round Miss Lindsay's neck, she kissed her fervently. "You darling soul," she cried earnestly, "I know I pain you deeply; but say it out I must, or it would kill me. There's no one else I dare speak to. Don't grieve for me, dear; I'm not left without some comfort. I can work for him, you know. I can try to do my duty as a wife. It's only when I sit still and think that I am unhappy. I must go now; he hates my being out of his sight. Poor soul, his life is very sad. I try to do all I can; I do, indeed. You mustn't think I am always unhappy," she added, in the desire to cheer Miss Lindsay's drooping spirits. "I am quite happy when I feel I can be of comfort or service to him—I am, indeed. Come, give me one of your real, true kisses; they always do me good, and make me strong and brave."

Miss Lindsay kissed Mabel, but she did not utter a single word; and Mabel went her way.

As soon as she was alone, Miss Lindsay

shook her head mournfully across the table. She did not make use of any of her vehement expressions of contempt.

“ You are horribly clever, wickedly clever, accursedly clever,” she murmured. “ I never thought you were so clever as this ; ” and, involuntarily and insensibly, Miss Lindsay yielded for the first time in her life that admiration to her old antagonist which we are compelled, *nolens volens*, to concede to the skill of our worst enemies—the admiration which a great general feels for a great opponent—an accomplished swordsman for a foe worthy of his steel. “ You have laid your accursed hand on that girl’s soul, and paralyzed her power of prayer ; you are building a great wall between her soul and God. ‘ Glasgow ’ and the ‘ Brazen Vessel, ’ ” she murmured mechanically in her great perplexity, but she no longer used the words as defiant battle-cries. “ We must have specific prayer, if possible—something to grip home ; generalized prayer won’t be half as effective ; and then with good, hearty, Scotch praying—— ”

But she could not quite see her way to frame a specific prayer. "Oh, you scoundrel," she exclaimed, half in a fretful protest, and half as a sort of appeal for generosity, "it's too bad to run me into a corner like this. With all your cleverness, it's cowardly, I say. Only fight me in the open, and I don't care; but don't keep dodging behind the bushes."

She took pen and paper with purpose to address a letter to the editor of the "Brazen Vessel," but her fluent pen halted after the first initial words. After a few moments of painful effort, "What's the meaning of this?" she cried, stricken with sudden terror. "Oh, Lord!" she exclaimed, in words of intense feeling, "don't let him beat me; he thinks he's going to snatch a precious soul from Margaret's hands. I can't tell you what to do; you must tell me; but, oh, don't let him harm that poor girl—she's the best and truest woman I ever met."

For the first time in her spiritual life Miss

Lindsay found herself unable to dictate or even suggest a course of action in her prayers ; hitherto she had been enabled to assume the position of a counsellor, or superior monitor, or even an awakener of the divine mercy ; but now she felt utterly helpless, and could only pray for help in an indefinite manner.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS LINDSAY WINS THE FIRST SKIRMISH.

MARY SMITH'S letters to her sister were very beautiful: they breathed a simple, unaffected spirit of piety, and they almost drove Mabel mad. The Rev. Mr. Simeon, however, read many of these letters with great pleasure and edification before they were despatched on their mission of consolation. Mrs. Smith, with a mother's pardonable pride, was wont to show them to the reverend gentleman, notwithstanding all Mary's earnest entreaties. As time progressed, Mr. Simeon became a very frequent visitor, or rather dropper-in, at the house: sometimes dinner, sometimes tea (Mr.

Simeon was a man who liked his muffin, and appreciated a well-infused cup—none of those second fillings-up, the result of large families); sometimes supper, a light digestible meal, something hot, just tossed off, savoury, but not too substantial; and Mr. Simeon had been peremptorily ordered by his doctor, notwithstanding many protests on his part, never to omit taking just one glass of very old Irish whiskey—one exact wineglass, full to the brim, his medical adviser had been very emphatic on this point—in rather more than half a tumbler of hot water, with two lumps of sugar, or even three, but no lemon; the whiskey, indeed, was a sound, warm friend to the inner man, but the lemon was the root of all evil. “Partaking, probably, of the nature of the forbidden fruit,” observed the reverend gentleman; “at least, so I am inclined to surmise, although, of course, our opinions on that point are necessarily speculative. In truth,” he continued, “I hold that the lemon in its use can only be rendered harm-

less, even to persons of strong digestion, when used as a concomitant in the preparation of the cheesecake. How much we may learn," said he, pursuing the subject in an elevated tone, "from these merely earthly creatures—evil rendered innocuous by being mingled with good things; nay, converted, in sort, into a happiness, or even a blessing, to man."

"I trust I shall never partake of another cheesecake," observed Mary Smith, earnestly, "without reflecting upon the valuable moral you have drawn." Both Mr. and Mrs. Smith warmly indorsed their daughter's resolution.

It was during after-supper periods that Mr. Simeon was usually favoured with the perusal of Mary Smith's letters. The subjects treated varied, of course, according to circumstances, but the method of treatment was invariable, and every subject conduced to edification, even at the cost sometimes of a certain straining of the language.

“DARLING PRECIOUS MABEL,

“We are just now greatly perplexed as to our choice of a carpet for my bedroom; perhaps a Dutch or a really stout Kidderminster would serve the purpose, but then they are not very durable; and sometimes we think that a Brussels, although dearer at first—but we must remember that last year’s patterns come cheaper by nearly ninepence halfpenny a yard. What a lesson this is to us all; yes, *now* is the appointed time, but last year has lost half its profit. Would Mr. Vaughan object to the prime cost of a Brussels? If he would not, why, then we should doubtless be directed to make a choice for the best; at least, I humbly trust we should.

“You are never absent from my thoughts, dearest. I never cease to rejoice in the many blessings bestowed upon you. Mr. Vaughan’s illness has indeed proved a wondrous mercy. Speaking for myself, I can never be sufficiently thankful for my own afflictions. I am by nature desperately

depraved and inherently wicked, and those afflictions have saved me from many worldly temptations; and you also, darling Mabel, have been taught not to trust in the earthly Mammon; yes, dearest, you have been mercifully preserved from a thousand dangers which beset the worldlings in their pilgrimage of sin."

Mr. Simeon frequently wiped away a tear (and Mrs. Smith treasured each tear as a testimony to her daughter's merit) after reading these effusions of pious resignation. Everything seemed so blessed and edifying. The room was very warm and comfortable; no draughts, the doors and windows having been carefully listed up; an easy armchair, a bright fire, the red curtains closely drawn, the grateful steam of the hot whiskey and water; outside, the rough, howling wind, and from the beach below the roar and thud of the beating waves; but inside that little room perfect peace. Mr. Simeon was wont at these seasons to pray very earnestly for

the mariners tossed on the troubled waters, and accepting the sea as an apt figure, he would pray for the souls of men tossed on the troubled waters of life—that their souls might be brought into that land-locked harbour where they themselves were safely moored; and their prayers, be it said, were thoroughly sincere and heartfelt, but they did not know how many were the cross-currents and perplexed winds which barred the *narrow* mouth of this their harbour—hindrances which would effectually prevent divers souls from ever finding rest in the quiet haven they had won.

“Why can’t she help and comfort me?” Mabel would often ask in surprise and despair when she read one of her sister’s letters. “She is so good, and kind, and loving, and she is my own sister; and yet Miss Lindsay’s kiss is the only thing that helps me on. I must be desperately wicked,” she exclaimed, “if Mary’s love and piety can do me no good. A curse must surely rest upon my head—almost a

murderer, though saved by God's mercy, yet morally guilty in God's eyes." But mercifully the dark cloud that gathered round her was dispelled by the devoted service she was called upon to render to the invalid; the call of daily duty saved her from hopeless despair.

For a short period Mabel had the satisfaction of feeling that her devotion and unselfishness had won their way in raising her husband from the mean level of his existence—in teaching him that there were beings devoid of all alloy of sordid motive, loyal in their very essence to the law of duty and right. She could raise him, indeed, to the sense of this higher life, but she could not sustain him at the lofty height. The day came to him at last when he could have won her heart and made her truly his; a great test-day, when perfect faith in her would have been blessedness for him; but Jacob Vaughan was unable to conceive such faith, and so, instead of blessedness, he found a curse.

It was the custom of the household for all the letters of the morning's delivery to be brought directly into Jacob's room, where they were opened and usually read aloud by Mabel. Jacob was always entertained by the morning's budget; business letters, letters from Torquay full of edification, and begging letters, for Jacob's wealth was well known. Mabel was usually the amanuensis in replying to these communications, for Jacob wrote with some difficulty. On one special morning there chanced to be fewer letters than usual: it was Jacob's amusement to con over the directions and make guesses as to the writer before opening the envelope. "I don't know this hand," he exclaimed, after a few moments' consideration, and he threw a letter across to Mabel. "A woman's hand, I fancy; it's addressed to you."

Mabel trembled when she saw the handwriting. Had it been possible, she would have endeavoured to conceal the letter from her husband.

"Whose writing is it?" asked Jacob.

"Mrs. Foster's, I think. I'm not sure."

"Who is Mrs. Foster?" he inquired.

"The mother of Mr. Frank Foster; the gentleman to whom I once told you I had been engaged."

"Ah, well," exclaimed Jacob, in a tone of irritation, "what the deuce does she want, writing to you?"

"She merely says she is ill, and that she would very much like to see me if I could call upon her." Mabel placed the letter in Jacob's hands.

"Where did you tell me this Mr. Foster was?" asked Jacob.

"Somewhere at Tiflis," she answered, "engaged on a railway survey; I haven't heard lately. You won't mind my calling upon Mrs. Foster?—she's a very old friend, though I have not seen her for a long time."

"Certainly not," Jacob answered, huffily; "call, by all means." He then changed the topic, referring to the contents of other

letters; but he seemed, nevertheless, pre-occupied, and more than usually irritated.

"If you don't wish me to see Mrs. Foster, I'm sure I won't," said Mabel, meekly.

"Nonsense; go, by all means," insisted Jacob. "I wish you to go—I can spare you for an hour's visit. Be exact, mind; take the brougham. I shall be interested to hear what she wants with you. Be off at once," added Jacob, peremptorily.

Mrs. Foster lay ill, reclining on a sofa; narrow circumstances, but a sufficiency for small wants. Mabel kissed her when she entered the room, but there was a certain feeling of constraint between the two women—the past had cast a cold shadow on their hearts.

"I have sent to ask you to do me a favour," said Mrs. Foster; "from what the doctors tell me, I believe I shall ask very few more favours of anybody."

"Oh, Mrs. Foster! don't say that," exclaimed Mabel.

"The doctors say so, my dear, and I

must accept His decree without repining ; indeed, I have only one tie that binds me to earth, though that indeed is a great bond—but——” she hesitated a moment, and then added, in changed tone, “but to business at once, because I know I have no right to detain you from your home duties.”

“I assure you that Mr. Vaughan——” interposed Mabel.

“It's not for myself,” continued Mrs. Foster, speaking rapidly and with an air of embarrassment. “I am going to ask you to do something for Frank.”

“Anything I can do,” answered Mabel, in a troubled voice.

“You must never say that I asked you,” continued Mrs. Foster ; “he would never forgive me if he knew it.”

“Why, may I not do a friendly act by him, or by any one, if I can?” pleaded Mabel.

“You and he are different from other people,” answered Mrs. Foster significantly.

“But you must remember,” exclaimed

Mabel, "that our engagement was broken off by mutual consent: we are no more to one another now than ordinary persons."

"True enough in mere words," rejoined Mrs. Foster; "it is only right you should feel so, Mabel; nay, it is your sacred duty."

"But he—Frank—Mr. Foster," stammered Mabel; "surely he has forgotten that foolish love affair. Surely he is not so absurd as to think about a stupid boy-and-girl attachment?"

"Don't let us pursue this painful subject," exclaimed Mrs. Foster, arousing herself from the train of thought into which she had fallen. "My request is simply this: Frank's great friend writes to me to say that the country is trying his health terribly; he has had one sad attack of fever; he is better now, but he ought to leave Tiflis."

"But Frank—what does he write?" inquired Mabel, with painful interest.

"He never writes about his health—he seems quite indifferent about himself now."

Mrs. Foster saw that Mabel started at her words. "You remember, my dear, that he always was very careless about his health," she added, endeavouring to qualify the effect of the previous sentence; but the added words could not hide the fatal admission from Mabel.

"You mean my marriage!" she exclaimed, in a mournful tone. "You mean—oh, my God!—you mean, he cares for me still?"

"I am sure, my dear, I never gave you to understand anything of that sort," rejoined Mrs. Foster, terrified by Mabel's emotion. But Mabel gave no credence to the empty denial.

"I have never forgotten him," she exclaimed, with sad emphasis; "never, never; but I thought he had forgotten me. God help me, I thought that—believed that——" and she sank back in her chair with a low cry of anguish.

She saw it all in her mind's eye—the vision of an instant, but a vision of vivid

reality. His love for her was warping his very existence. Faithful, though she had been false; this poor human nature, which she had been taught to despise as the devil's handicraft—behold, it was very noble and true.

Mrs. Foster had no real idea of the strength of Mabel's agony; in very love for her son, and with resulting animosity against Mabel, she could not resist one home-thrust. "I know your engagement was broken off; but if you had never forgotten him, why did you marry that rich man?"

"Why, why?" echoed Mabel mechanically, and she sought awhile for a reply; a lie had wrought the evil, a lie must avert the sad results. "Why," she exclaimed suddenly, starting from her chair, "because I liked to be rich! I had been so poor all my life—had worked so hard," she continued, in a sort of half-hysterical laugh; "and I thought it would be so nice to have money—fine clothes, a carriage—no longer

a beggarly governess, but a rich woman. Tell him that; tell him that you have seen me, that I enjoy being rich. A poor boy-and-girl marriage, indeed, with a lot of wretched, half-clothed, half-washed children! Nonsense moping after any woman in this absurd way; it is positively too ridiculous, Mrs. Foster. Tell him from me that he must get well and strong as soon as he can, and work hard and make a fortune; money's the thing, after all; there are numbers of women who will like to marry him then. Well, and what's the favour you want me to do?" she asked, abruptly.

"Nothing, Mrs. Vaughan, I thank you," answered Mrs. Foster, in a tone of voice that assured Mabel, who stood writhing with shame and self-contempt beneath her mask of assumed cynicism, that the cursed words had had their effect.

"Oh! but you must tell me," rejoined Mabel, with a forced laugh. "Remember what a long way I have come."

"It is merely that I have been informed

that Mr. Vaughan has great interest, through money transactions with Sleafords, the contractors who employ my son. They carry on works in other parts of the world. A word from Mr. Vaughan would cause Frank to be removed to a more healthy place."

"Is that all?" exclaimed Mabel. "Of course I'll ask—I'd ask a favour of that sort for any friend. I am only very glad that I am in a position which enables me to ask favours for my friends. I positively must say good-bye, Mrs. Foster. I wish I could stay longer, but I mustn't keep the brougham waiting. Mr. Vaughan is so fidgety about his horses; he always buys for me the finest that money can procure. Tell Frank to work hard and make a fortune; some day, when he returns to England—a rich man, mind—I promise to find him a wife among my friends. Farewell!"

In another minute Mabel would have broken down; she did break down utterly when she was alone in her brougham.

“Dear Frank! darling Frank!” she murmured; “true-hearted, noble Frank! he will cease to care for me when he reads his mother’s next letter—thank God for that.”

Jacob Vaughan lay brooding over the contents of Mrs. Foster’s letter. It was a very small matter. But thought presently kindled a spark of discontent. A small soul was Jacob Vaughan’s, but large enough to house a large proportion of mean qualities, and it was warped, moreover, by the morbid influences of shattered health. Mrs. Foster’s letter was perfectly simple and candid. She had wished to see Mabel as an old friend; but the letter was sufficient to light up the fire of jealousy; no need for a lying scoundrel to stand at Jacob Vaughan’s elbow and weave a tissue of lies—he carried Iago in his own bosom, and he created his own promptings to jealousy. Dull of thought and slow of imagination had been Jacob Vaughan, but the inert mass was quickened by the new flame, and the ordinary blank of thought was filled with

strange pictures of the imagination. He painted a future, and saw it in his mind's eye—a future not very far distant, for he felt that his own days were numbered. He beheld his wife married to her first lover. The grave indeed would have closed over him, and death would have absolved her from all duty and fidelity to him, her now husband; but the future possibility seemed as painfully vivid as a present reality, and he wholly forgot that his own death was a necessary factor in the realization of his vision.

Mabel hurried into her husband's room as soon as she arrived home; she was all eagerness to fulfil her promise to Mrs. Foster—the tears, indeed, were scarcely dry in her eyes.

“Well,” he asked impatiently, arousing himself at her presence from his morbid thoughts, “and what did she want?”

“It was about her son—Mr. Foster,” answered Mabel. “He is very ill at Tiflis; the climate don't agree with him. Mrs.

Foster hears that your influence with the Sleafords would get him removed to a more healthy post."

"My influence, indeed!" answered Jacob sullenly.

"Do it for my sake, if you can," she asked with eager expression.

"Why for your sake?" exclaimed Jacob in angry tone.

"Why—why," she answered with hesitation, "why, I was once engaged to be married to him, you know that. It was broken off because we were too poor; but—" she stammered.

"But you love him still?" he rejoined, tauntingly.

"I am your wife!" she answered with dignity, though her face flushed at his words.

"But you love him still?" reiterated Jacob violently. "Out with it, yes or no; no lies, mind—they won't do."

"My answer is, I am your wife. I have never forgotten that, God knows."

“You do love him?” he persisted.

“I will not tell you a lie; I do love him,” she answered with firmness, though a tremor ran through her frame as she made the avowal. “Don’t let there be any equivocation on the point; I do love him.”

He started with surprise at the unexpected boldness and candour of her declaration.

“I cannot help loving him. That’s not my fault, though it may be my misfortune. What I can do is to be faithful in my duty to you as a wife. I have been faithful in the sight of God and man! Not one word, not one jot of communication, verbal or written, has ever passed between us since I married you, or, indeed, for a long time before that. I have sworn never to see him again.”

“Till I die!” shrieked Jacob.

“Death may come to either or all at any moment,” she answered solemnly.

“Till I die,” he reiterated; “and then?”

“Have mercy!” she cried, and she fell

on her knees at his side. "You know in your own heart that I have been true to you in word and deed; deal generously with me—use the influence you possess in his behalf, and I shall love you with my whole heart and soul."

"For his sake," he retorted, vindictively.

It was a bitter rejoinder to her declaration of truth and honesty. "Oh, merciful Heaven!" she murmured hopelessly, and turning away from him, she left the room; and thus it was that Jacob Vaughan threw away the golden opportunity that was afforded him of winning his wife's heart.

She had not been absent very long, scarcely time enough to bathe her eyes, when he sent for her.

"My reading, my reading," he exclaimed, reproachfully; "you are forgetting that. Time is very precious with us all, and you have scarcely read anything to-day."

Mary Smith had, as we have seen, announced to Mr. Simeon that Jacob Vaughan had been mercifully awakened to a sense of

sin. That he stood in sore need of conversion no candid person could deny. He possessed many patent faults : he was mean, ungenerous, and selfish ; he was a coward to boot. Well, his conversion was not difficult. They talked to him about the wrath to come, and he became frightened ; they told him his soul was in imminent peril, and his selfishness sealed his repentance. He clung desperately to every watchword of faith, to every religious exercise that was recommended—religious books, they said, let him read them diligently ; and he converted the mediums of religious life into a superstitious worship as abject as any Romish worship of image or picture. The act of reading, or hearing a religious book read for a certain set period during the day, was converted in his eyes into an act which savoured of salvation. There were those who boasted loudly of his conversion, and he indeed echoed all the watchwords of salvation with a fervour as intense as the most pious persons could desire—the

fervour of abject terror; and the old selfishness of his nature was irradiated by the *fear* of God. So, with his eyes blinded by that fear, he never knew that close at his side, tending him devotedly day by day, was one who, in the strong sense of duty, was striving to vanquish self—that in following her example, and forgetting self for the sake of others, he might have found happiness instead of gloom, turning religion into a joy instead of a fear; but his spiritual advisers had only succeeded in hardening his self-love.

Mabel took up the book at her husband's bidding, and read its words of fervent piety in her accustomed tones. It was a very irksome task. Notwithstanding all her early training, there was growing up in her a desolating sense of the awful hollowness of mere verbal profession. The watchwords of her childhood were fast becoming abhorrent in her mouth; and, inasmuch as her best feelings had been rooted in those professions, there was, of course, the danger

lest, in the destruction of those watchwords, the whole fabric might crumble away in the hour of temptation. It was at this point of danger that Miss Lindsay's sincerity and truth stood like a firm buttress, and her honest love like a tower of strength ; there was still truth and faith, because Miss Lindsay was true and faithful.

Mabel continued reading until the act had become merely mechanical—the work of eyes and lips ; and yet it was impassioned reading—the thunderings of Sinai and their warnings to sinners—and her voice rose and fell in due cadence ; but her thoughts stole away to the lover who loved her still, who was dying, perchance, sick at heart, by reason of her faithlessness, and so on to the thought of the desperate cure she had sought to effect, at how bitter a sacrifice !

The thunderings entered Jacob's ears, and for a while he trembled at the terror of the denunciations ; but gradually the new-born thought of jealousy intervened between the sound of Mabel's voice and his own

mental receptivity, and his mind was wholly filled with the new bitterness. As he gazed upon her, fair and comely as she was, though worn with constant watching and anxiety, he swore that she should never be the wife of another man; that, living or dead, no rival should stand betwixt him and her; that the love he had never won, no man should ever win.

The chapter was read to the end; the set task of salvation for that day had been duly accomplished. Jacob said "Amen" fervently at the conclusion. "Tell Mary," said he, "to ask Mr. Simeon to recommend some more books; and mind, they are to ask him to dinner whenever they like, and I'll send down a three-dozen hamper of that fruity port."

"The carpet for Mary's bedroom?" asked Mabel, referring to her sister's letter.

"Hey? let me consider," answered Jacob; "the question is stout Brussels or Kidderminster, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Mabel.

“Let them have a Brussels, if it’s for Mary’s bedroom; last year’s pattern, of course. I don’t grudge an extra shilling a yard—she’s so good, and writes such blessed letters. Oh, Mabel, may we all grow like her, rooted and grounded in faith!” But his prayer was aimed as a reproach to Mabel.

Mabel never uttered another word to her husband with regard to Frank Foster, but the suppressed feeling rankled terribly in her heart. She continued to perform her wonted duties to the invalid with, if possible, increased zeal and conscientiousness. This service was almost a solace to her aching heart; there was a certain sense of retaliation in heaping benefits like coals of fire on his head. Jacob, however, was only sensible of the comfort of the additional service—he did not guess the motive; and if he had guessed it, he would not have been troubled by the knowledge. Enough that the girl was his slave. She did his bidding and obeyed his behests, and that was suffi-

cient for him. He rejoiced vindictively in his sense of power ; it was a delight to him to think, in the intervals of religious exercises, that with a wave of the hand he could destroy the home at Torquay ; that it was in his power to bind the woman who did not love him, fast and sure, the wife or widow of Jacob Vaughan, to the end of her life.

They chose the new bedroom carpet at Torquay, and they blessed Providence for vouchsafing this new mercy. The patterns were submitted for Mary's approval, Mr. Simeon assisting at the selection. Mary's mind was for a time full of doubt. The carpet chosen in the end was really a very cheerful, well-covered pattern, not too much white in the ground. When it was fitted and laid down, Mary protested with tears in her eyes that she did not deserve such a blessing ; it seemed sinful, she said, to spend so much money for the comfort of our vile bodies. To Mrs. Smith's dismay, Mary presently declared that she would not suffer the carpet to remain in her room. "No,

mother, I was very wicked and thoughtless to have set my mind on a new carpet, a creature of sinful luxury."

"But think of the holes, my love, in the old Kidderminster," protested Mrs. Smith.

"Let the new carpet be sold," said Mary, peremptorily, "and the profit spent in buying cotton drawers for the poor little Barbary Jews."

Mr. Smith's influence with his daughter, such as it was, and it was not very much, was invoked by Mrs. Smith in her despair; but it was invoked in vain. At this untoward juncture Mr. Simeon very judiciously intervened, to the great relief of both parents; he pointed out, in the kindest and clearest manner, enforcing every word with scriptural proof, that Heaven, in its mysterious dealings with sinful men, quite as often tries our faith by blessings as by misfortunes. The carpet was indeed very soft and warm to the feet, plenty of woollen texture (it happened to be the remnant of a pattern piece, and not cut from the ordinary

stock), and after Mr. Simeon's very lucid and forcible exposition of scriptural truth, Mary felt it her duty to acquiesce cheerfully in the blessing ordained for her, accepting it in the light of a merciful trial; the little Barbary Jews retaining their original brown nudity as a consequence of Mary's altered feelings.

“Another proof, my dear lady,” observed Mr. Simeon to Mrs. Smith, “of your beloved daughter's spiritual progress; she is gradually learning to consider blessings and misfortunes in the same light; both tending to one end, religious edification.” They begged him to stay to dinner. He said, “No.” They pressed him earnestly; Mr. Vaughan, they said, would be anxious to learn his opinion of the new port. After a while, with gracious acquiescence, he stayed. He pronounced a very favourable opinion upon the wine submitted to him—stout body, well crusted, with matured bottle flavour, and admirably adapted for autumn and winter drinking. While sip-

ping a second glass (and, as a rule, he never exceeded a second glass, except in very cold and trying weather, and even then under protest) he noted down a list of theological works for Mr. Vaughan. "It is only the true Christian," said he, giving the list to Mary, "who can estimate the blessed state of your dear relation." He finished the glass, and, in a benign spirit of goodwill to all men, left the house.

Mary duly forwarded the list to her sister, together with a letter, admirably expressed, on the subject of spiritual trials, and embodying her own inward experiences with regard to the bedroom carpet.

This letter was not productive of any comfort to Mabel; but Mrs. Smith, who had made a careful copy, lent the epistle to several judicious friends, members of Mr. Simeon's congregation, who complimented her warmly upon the thorough spirit of scriptural piety which it evinced, and finally Mr. Simeon retained the draft with the possible view to a future biography.

Miss Lindsay alone knew what Mabel suffered, and every turn of the affair added to her sore perplexity. One day Mabel placed in her hands a letter from Mrs. Foster upbraiding her for the non-fulfilment of her promise, and she also gave to Miss Lindsay the draft of her reply—heartless, careless, almost flippant in tone.

“But these are lies,” said Miss Lindsay, with a deep sigh.

“They are,” answered Mabel. “But how can I speak the truth?”

“No good can ever come of lies,” urged Miss Lindsay.

“But if I had told Mrs. Foster that I love Frank, that I always have loved him, and now that I know he loves me, I love him a thousand times more than ever, how then?”

“But I say you must not love this man,” answered Miss Lindsay with dismay and alarm.

“But I do,” rejoined Mabel. “I can’t afford to tell lies to you, and I won’t. I do love him,” she reiterated with decision.

“Mark my words. If I ever conceal one jot or tittle of the truth from you in this matter—if I ever gloss my real feelings with a false statement, either to you or to my husband, I shall be inevitably lost, and your power of good over me will be gone.”

Miss Lindsay made no answer. Mabel burst into tears. “Oh, my good angel!” she cried, clinging convulsively to Miss Lindsay, “let me have my cry out in your arms. That letter will be sent to Frank; it will certify the truth of his mother’s first story—it will show him in black and white how weak and contemptible is the woman he loved so faithfully. That thought is my only consolation.”

“What good am I? Heaven help me, what good?” sighed Miss Lindsay, as she pressed Mabel to her bosom with heartfelt pressure.

“You can always give me a kiss,” answered Mabel.

“I can and will,” replied Miss Lindsay, and she kissed Mabel forthwith. “You are

quite right, my darling, about telling me the truth. But those other lies to Mrs. Foster, I don't like them; better far have said nothing. Depend upon it, the father of lies is always at the bottom of every lie, and he always works a lie for his own purpose, sooner or later—I know that well enough, cunning scoundrel as he is. Let us pray no harm may come of it."

But harm did come of it, although not in immediate sequence. Months passed, and Mabel held faithfully to her task of duty. She read the religious books recommended to her husband by Mr. Simeon. She was either heedless of the words, or, if heedful of them, then with fierce inward protest and feelings of rank rebellion against the lessons they inculcated, and she beheld with terror the spectacle of a selfish heart indurated by religious fear. One day she saw in the obituary of the *Times* an announcement of Mrs. Foster's death, and she tasted for the first time the fruits of her lie in the sad feeling that Mrs. Foster had

died despising her, and holding her in contempt. There was bitterness enough in the taste, but the fuller fruit had yet to ripen. It came to maturity a few months later.

One day, with garden hat hurriedly thrust on her head, with a shawl carelessly huddled on her shoulders, Mabel burst into the presence of Miss Lindsay, who was sitting quietly in her arm-chair perusing the "Brazen Vessel." "I want you, Miss Lindsay," she cried, panting, and breathless with agitation and running; and she sank down on the footstool at Miss Lindsay's feet.

"Yes, my darling," answered Miss Lindsay, "I'm ready!" She laid the "Brazen Vessel" on the table, and kissed Mabel's forehead.

"Don't kiss me—it's no good," exclaimed Mabel, and she started away from Miss Lindsay's feet, and grovelled on the floor. "He's come to England," she muttered incoherently, "desperately ill, dying at Southampton, his friend says."

Miss Lindsay looked right across the room, her glance passing over Mabel's body, and she nodded her head with significant action.

"So you've done it at last, you cowardly beast!" she exclaimed, sternly.

"They thought he would have died on the voyage," continued Mabel, in mournful tones.

"No, no," ejaculated Miss Lindsay, still gazing across the room, "that wasn't your miserable dodge, you scoundrel."

"Sometimes his mind wanders, and then he calls my name."

"Of course, of course," rejoined Miss Lindsay, "of course he does;" and she shook her clenched hand violently.

"And then—oh, my God!" and Mabel started to her feet; her eyes were tearless, and anguish stood written in her face. "When his mind is more itself, he calls me false, fickle, heartless."

"Ay, ay," responded Miss Lindsay, with fixed glance, and still shaking her

fist with anger. "You needn't tell me any more; I understand it all—every syllable, every word. Does he think—that scoundrel, I mean," and Miss Lindsay's voice assumed a tone of scornful defiance—"does he think that Margaret Lindsay was such a fool as not to guess what he was about? Don't let him fancy for a moment that he has taken me by surprise—he knows I told him what his wretched plan would be more than two years ago, and he knows I'm prepared for him now. Hush, Mabel! it's for me to speak. I shall tell him to his face what you were going to tell me. Come to me, darling. Throw your arms round my neck—he shan't harm you; he knows I'm not afraid; he won't dare to touch you when you are in Margaret Lindsay's arms."

She drew Mabel to her, and clasped the girl to her bosom. The enemy had left off skulking behind the bushes, and had come out into the open, and Margaret Lindsay was herself again. She drew herself up to her full height; the blood that had been

shed at Chillianwallah coursed through her veins, and flushed her countenance; the keen, stern glance of her defiant eyes had been the glance of her brother Bob as he parried thrust and blow, and led his handful of cavalry in many a desperate charge on that road to Lucknow. Against the devil and all his power she stood in battle array; the little parlour was a great battle-field, and the hosts of the evil one were gathered to the fight, and Margaret Lindsay exulted in the thought of battle.

“This girl that I love and honour, you wanted to frighten her away from me. This girl that God has given into my charge has come to tell me ‘the man I love is dying; the man I love thinks me false and untrue; he thinks me vain and frivolous, a miserable worldling—he’s going to die with that sad thought in his mind. I can’t endure it, I can’t let the grave close upon that lie; at all cost, no matter what, I must go to him, see him, tell him the truth before he dies—tell him that I love him.

His poor mother is dead ; he is alone among strangers, poor fellow ! in some strange lodging, perhaps without proper comforts—dying alone.’ ”

Mabel burst into a violent flood of tears, and would have sunk to the ground, if Miss Lindsay had not held her up by sheer strength ; indeed, Miss Lindsay’s own frame was agitated by emotion, and her voice had become somewhat choked by tears.

“ Margaret Lindsay is not ashamed of crying. Don’t fancy Margaret is a coward because she cries ; ” and then in a sudden voice of exultation she exclaimed, “ The battle’s over ! Cold steel, hey ?—you and all your cursed crew routed by a woman. Margaret Lindsay has won the victory, and you know it ! Get out of the room ! ” she added, in a peremptory voice. “ Go, you beaten cur ! It’s all over, darling,” she whispered in Mabel’s ear. “ Praise be to God who giveth the victory ! I wish I could sing,” she murmured ; “ he hates a

good psalm-tune thundered out at him in a big bass voice as he runs away." She sank down into her chair, still holding Mabel in her arms.

"I'm off to Southampton in another half-hour, darling. I'm going to nurse him, poor young fellow! I'm going to be his mother. I'm going to tell him the whole truth. Tell me his address, and all you have heard about him, and then you shall go home;" and she bent down her head and kissed Mabel.

CHAPTER V.

A SECOND VICTORY.

MABEL returned home in a measure comforted. She knew that Frank Foster would be cared for with the truest care by Miss Lindsay ; that, whether for life or death, it would be well with him in her faithful hands. The fierce tempest of her bosom was indeed lulled, but in the revulsion of feeling an intolerable sense of shame fell upon her as she entered her husband's room. In her dire anguish at the story suddenly told her by Frank Foster's friend, she had almost flung away the chains of duty. As far as purpose and intention went, she had really done so in her hurried walk to Miss Lindsay's house ;

but evil purpose and intention had paled away in the strength of that true woman's wise and merciful love; and though it is possible, under any circumstances, that the evil purpose would have been averted long before execution, none the less did the sense of crime weigh on Mabel's conscience.

Happily, it was still her right to enter her husband's room—still her right to minister to his wants—to soothe the irritability of his afflicted condition—to stand at his bedside as his true and lawful wife. It would still be well with her parents and sister at Torquay—their lives would still be lived in pleasant comfort and peace. The awful danger to which her mad anguish had exposed her, seemed to grow into a visible embodiment of horror as she fell upon her knees at the foot of Jacob's bed, and wept sore tears. In the sense of Frank Foster's well-being, and in the thought of her own recent danger, a feeling of repulsion arose with regard to her old lover, and a feeling of tenderness arising out of gratitude for her

own preservation seemed insensibly to attach her with new bonds to Jacob Vaughan: the pendulum swings to and fro, and the adjustments of the human heart are very subtle.

Even Jacob, who was not gifted with a ready power of discernment, felt in some dim way that Mabel's conscientious sense of duty was irradiated by an unwonted tenderness; and in truth Mabel's repentance and gratitude for deliverance took the form of a great outpouring of love and devotion.

After a day or two, a letter duly arrived from Southampton, with the address in Miss Lindsay's writing. Mabel intercepted the letter before it reached her husband's room. She detested this concealment, and would have given worlds to have read the contents to her husband; but she did not dare to do this, and she opened the letter in the solitude of her own room—not with eagerness, but rather with repugnance and shame, and this feeling was increased when she found that Miss Lindsay was enabled to give a fair

report of the invalid, coupled with very hopeful assurance of eventual recovery.

The letter was rather long. It alluded but little to Mr. Foster—designedly, no doubt : its chief matter was an indignant, though not a very coherent, protest—the outpouring of Miss Lindsay's excited feelings. "It's his rascally mean, nigging habits I hate," stated the letter. "I don't mind a big battle, but why must he plague a woman by meddling with beef-tea? I knew he was in the house the moment the flyman plumped down my boxes in the hall. If ever I saw a false hussey in my life, it is this precious landlady. She wore a widow's cap, and she slunk down on the hall chair and begged my pardon, because the Lord had blessed her with many afflictions, and her breath was bad, the stairs in Southampton being always steep. First, her husband had been taken, who was in the sea line, and swore a great deal, though not otherwise reprobate, and then her two blessed infants ; and then the bailiffs who cleared the house under a bill of

sale—though her furniture was mercifully redeemed through Gospel Love; and it didn't become her, as being regenerate, to have roasting done on the Sabbath, though potatoes might stand in the oven without sin, but not meat on the spit with hot dripping for those who look for crowns of Glory.

“He's got her, I said to myself—he's filled her poor soul with empty words, and barren doctrine, and hollow lies; but still I hoped for the best. I told her to send out directly for one pound of the best gravy-beef, and before I went upstairs I gave her directions how to make half a tea-cupful of real essence of beef—printed directions, that a child could understand.

“In three quarters of an hour she sent up a cup of hot water with some grease floating at the top. He's got her, sure enough! I exclaimed—essence of beef is a test that never fails! A liar can't make essence of beef, though a liar can quote Scripture by the page. Poor woman! she's too far gone for my salvation—he's sugared her wretched

soul all over with lying cant and Scripture words. I sent out for another pound of gravy-beef, and I made it myself, and stood over it all the time it simmered, and it's gradually building him up—the Lord's blessing, and that good, true, honest essence of beef, the Lord be praised ! And I shall tell him everything in good time, be sure of that ; but as for beef-tea, and everything else that enters the house, butter and all—the scoundrel sets that poor woman to picking and stealing, and I'm forced to watch things like a cat ; that's why I hate his mean paltry ways.

“ Mr. Foster is, on the whole, a very good and patient invalid—though he certainly swears now and then (I attribute the habit partly to original sin, and partly to nervous irritation through dealing with those rascally Orientals) ; and I fancy I detected an oath or two, just muttered in an underbreath, as I was reading aloud that dear, sweet tract, ‘ Pots of Honey, or Little Tommy's Temptation.’ But I like him all the better for a

little swearing. I can always get on so well with sinners. I delight in a thoroughly good sinner! it's your 'good' people who always beat me. That scoundrel knows where I'm weak, and when he's bent on worrying me—as he is just now, out of spite—he always sets one of those poor lost souls right in my way, like that miserable landlady. May the Lord have mercy on her, poor thing, for she's past man's help, or woman's either."

Miss Lindsay was a thoroughly good nurse, and fortunately, moreover, she was in that state of buoyant spirits which is very infectious for good in the case of those who are in a depressed condition, physical or mental. She had good reason for being thus jubilant: the long-expected battle had been fought, and the victory was with her. The landlady on her part was very grateful to Providence, for she had never before been blessed with such a lodger; never before had she been able to plunder so largely with so much impunity; prime cuts

of the joint fell before her shameless knife, and the hot meats grew curiously less in the process of cooling. Miss Lindsay had sharp eyes, and nothing escaped her; but she considered these purloinings in the light of petty reprisals on the part of the arch-foe, and in the strength of her substantial victory she could afford to regard them with contempt. She looked upon the landlady, indeed, as a mere catspaw, and it lent a very enjoyable zest to her solitary meals to be able to carry on a fire of sarcastic comments across the table with regard to the diminished food—bread and butter, and meat and eggs, and tea and sugar. She jeered triumphantly at the petty meanness and grovelling nature of her vanquished enemy. “You shan’t worry me,” she cried, with good-humoured derision; “don’t fancy it for a moment; ten shillings a week, more or less, will pay for all your miserable thefts, and as for my essence of beef, I’ll take good care you never meddle with that.” Sometimes it

must be confessed, when Miss Lindsay was more than usually provoked, she paid back her debt in weightier coin. It was irresistibly delightful to her to twit her antagonist on his failure, and deride the impotence of his deep-laid schemes. "So, so, you thought you would have lured that poor girl here, did you? and destroyed her soul, hey? but Margaret came instead, you see. Margaret bothers you, hey? Margaret means to bother you, and she means to keep watch and ward, recollect; so you had best be off with your cursed plots, and leave those two poor souls at peace."

Those who only knew Margaret Lindsay in the ordinary walks of life, and beheld her armed *cap-à-pie* with aggressive determination against the devil and all his lies, did not know the heart of tenderness that beat beneath the armour. Mabel Vaughan knew it, and Frank Foster learnt it quickly, though something of martial brevity, and even a touch of *brusquerie*, always clung to her manner and voice, and her bearing,

erect and gaunt, had much of the military type ; in truth, her tenderness was rather of a masculine nature—that supreme tenderness of men, which is so often linked to supreme courage and dare-devil force.

For some time during his great weakness Frank Foster did not know who Miss Lindsay really was ; he thought, when he was able to think at all, that she was a very skilful nurse hired to nurse him by the doctor ; but, hired or not, he soon felt that her services were beyond all reward of wages. Miss Lindsay was well content to let him remain in his ignorance. She had promised to tell him the truth about Mabel ; but notwithstanding her undaunted courage, she involuntarily shrank from the ordeal.

“ I have accepted all your kindness and devotion,” said Foster, addressing her one day ; “ I want to know to whom I am indebted.”

“ My name's Lindsay—Margaret Lindsay,” she answered.

“ Are you a professional nurse ? ”

“No,” she replied, without further comment.

“Then I am still more your debtor,” he rejoined, “though money could never pay the debt I owe you. You have come here, you, a lady, to nurse me because I am all alone without any friends;” and tears of gratitude stood in his eyes.

“Beef-tea time,” rejoined Miss Lindsay. “The doctor says you are not to talk;” and she abruptly terminated the conversation.

But the ordeal was only postponed to a future day, and the thought of it rendered Miss Lindsay somewhat fidgety. “So you are going to worry me about this business, are you?” she exclaimed one afternoon over her solitary tea-table. “I don’t care for half a pound of sugar, or a quarter of a pound of butter either way, or that cold shoulder of lamb at dinner, though it’s downright shameful, looking at the market price; but I can see you are up to your cursed tricks with that poor young fellow. You think I’m afraid of telling him the

truth; but I'm not! I tell you fifty times over, I'm not! As soon as he's well enough he shall know everything." Nevertheless, although Miss Lindsay kept a bold front towards the enemy, she really did feel afraid in her heart of hearts. It was her custom to act on the spur of the moment, but she found herself thinking as to *how much* of the truth she might truthfully tell.

The day came at last. She was sitting at his beside; he took her hand in his with such strength as he had. "I want to speak to you—I must. You are always doing some good work for me—I want to tell you the great work you have done."

"Two minutes, not a moment more," she answered; "I can't stay."

"I say, I owe so much to you——" he continued.

"The Lord's blessing, and essence of beef," she rejoined.

"Of course," he answered; "but more than that——"

“Pots of honey!” she exclaimed; “it never fails.”

“Your faithfulness, and steadfast kindness,” he replied, emphatically. “I had lost all faith in woman’s truth—I was in love once, you must know.” Miss Lindsay began to tremble. “It was real love, though it began in boyhood. She was the grand dream of my life—she filled up, yes, brimming over, my ideal of a grand woman, though she was only a girl; so good, so noble, so brave, so self-denying. Only a boy and girl, as they called us, but I loved her—God help me!—I never knew how much I loved her.”

“Yes, yes,” murmured Miss Lindsay, averting her head.

“We couldn’t marry, they all declared; of course we couldn’t, and I suppose they spoke wisely. Well, the engagement was broken off; we were free. Free! good God! as if I could be ever free—but we were free, they said, she and I, to marry whom we would. I went away to the East. I should

soon forget the stupid affair, they all told me; she would marry some one else, they predicted, and I should do the same; distance and time would assuredly cure the heart pang—a flesh wound, a mere scratch, the wise folks said with a smile. But the cure never came to me; my grand woman always lived in my heart—my star of womanhood always shone in my heaven. One day I received a letter from my mother—the girl I loved was going to be married—a rich old man. I didn't believe it; I couldn't believe it, though my mother had written the words. I went out that day all by myself; I wandered to some solitary place among the rocks—no living being dwelt there—only the limestone, and the purple shadows, and the cloudless blue sky. I cried aloud, 'No, no! not this thing, not this horrible, monstrous thing; she can't! not that man's polluting touch; she can't, she can't!' I shouted till the echoes answered me. I flung myself down on the burning rock, beneath the fierce rays of

that Eastern sun. ‘Fool and wretch!’ I shrieked scornfully; ‘you will try to lure her with your gold; but never, never your wife—never, she will die first; never, in God’s name; but *my* wife, mine—mine, in God’s sight—God and I there alone.’ And in the agony of my horrible thoughts, I clutched the hard rock, and I prayed—I shrieked out prayers, prayers of agony, with the perspiration streaming from me, that this thing should not come to pass. There was no mortal eye to see me; no one to scoff at me, no one to laugh at me; only the hard, burning rock.

“Well, I was a fool for my pains, and my prayers, and all my shouting and shrieking. My mother’s next letter said she was married. It was on the very day—I verified the date in my pocket-book—when I made such an idiot of myself among the rocks. I turned almost sick with shame when I read the words; my grand ideal was destroyed, the idol of my life had fallen—the promised cure of my heart-ache had

come with a vengeance, for the great faiths of my life were clean swept out. Ay, I had loved her, once with highest honour, and still I loved her with pity. 'If she must pass through this shame,' I cried, 'let the nobleness of her nature be blunted—let her fine feelings be destroyed—let her be saved from those pangs of self-contempt and self-loathing—let her at least be happy in this degradation.' It was so ordained, mercifully, I believe; my poor mother saw her some time after her marriage—the girl I had worshipped had become worthy of her destiny, revelling in her husband's vulgar wealth. Enough of her; but the loss of her had left me a hopeless sceptic, and with the loss of my mother my faith had gone in women. This is what you have done for me," he said, earnestly: "you have restored some of the old faith, some of the old belief in the old ideals; the true metal has rung out again in your steadfastness, and truth, and devoted care. If I recover, body and soul will have

.

received their healing at your hands; accept my gratitude, it is all I can give you;" and he pressed Miss Lindsay's hand with all the strength he possessed.

Miss Lindsay vouchsafed no immediate reply. They sat for a while in silence; suddenly, without the slightest premonitory indication, Miss Lindsay exclaimed the word "Beast!" in an emphatic voice.

The invalid started with surprise. "Scoundrel!" continued Miss Lindsay, and she shook her fist in her accustomed manner.

"What do you mean?" inquired the invalid, in hopeless perplexity.

"He's trying to make me tell lies!"

"Who?—pray explain."

"The devil! he's here—here in this room."

"Absurd!" exclaimed Foster, in a state of utter bewilderment.

"Absurd or not, he's here," retorted Miss Lindsay, her face flushing at the invalid's scepticism.

"But I can't see him, or, indeed, see

any one except yourself," objected Foster, with a smile of incredulity, and some doubts as to Miss Lindsay's sanity.

"Of course you can't," rejoined Miss Lindsay in a tone of pitiful contempt; "people in the dark can't see, can they? But he's here for all that. He's trying to make me tell lies, the old serpent—trying to entangle Margaret Lindsay in miserable subterfuges and little fibs; but Margaret means to speak the truth right out, every jot and tittle. Attend to me, Mr. Foster. I'm here nursing you because Mabel Vaughan isn't! I'm here, because Mabel Vaughan is true, and faithful, and noble, and loves you as much as ever. It's all that beast's doing," continued Miss Lindsay, jerking her words into the ears of the astonished invalid. "Why he is allowed to do it I can't tell; why she should be tried through the nobleness of her nature, when there are so many mean, frivolous, false-hearted, lying men and women for him to tamper with, I say I can't tell; but the battle-field is full of

smoke, as my brother Bob used to say—my brother Bob who died fighting at Lucknow ; and if we can't see the general's plan, we have our orders, and we must stick to them, and fight on to the end, which is always victory if we fight hard. I *will* tell him every jot of the truth, you scoundrel," she exclaimed, glancing with defiance across the room. "He came to her, Mr. Foster, that miserable serpent, and he whispered in her ear that this marriage was an act of duty, an act of self-sacrifice—he couldn't lure her in any other way ; and she married to buy a home, and comforts, and luxuries for those she loved—not for herself, poor child ; not for herself, I say. She has been a true and devoted wife, God help her ! and so she need be, with that poor miserable invalid of a husband. When she learned from your mother how true and faithful your love had been for her—how her marriage had cast a blight over your life—then he, that vile serpent, whispered in her ear that it would at least be an act of mercy that

you should be led to think slightly of the woman you had lost, and so, at his cursed suggestion, she deliberately asserted her degradation. Can't you see his infernal hand now?" Miss Lindsay exclaimed with emphasis. "Why, man alive, it's as plain as a pikestaff; he meant, through her unendurable anguish at the thought lest you should die with that false belief in your heart, to force her to leave home and husband, and duty and right, and come to you, and shame and wrong—to triumph over her virtue, to drag down her noble nature to perdition. But I was there; I, Margaret Lindsay, was, by the Lord's blessing, sent to baffle the scoundrel, and I baffled him! and I have come to you instead of her—I have come to tell you to love her, and reverence her, and worship her. Up, man, and be strong in this faith; there *is* balm in Gilead! She is worthy of you, I have shown you that; and you are worthy of her, you have taught me that. You are indeed parted asunder by strong barriers that must

never be broken. So far he has won his victory of impotent spite ; but across that barrier, there she stands, as great as ever, as true as ever, as noble as ever—the woman that you and I love and reverence.”

“Thank God !” murmured the invalid ; and he sank back in his bed, and burst into tears.

“He’s gone now, Mr. Foster ; he *was* here, indeed he was ! but he’s gone ; he can’t bear the truth, it stifles him, he can’t breathe in it—he can only live in an atmosphere of lies, or a fog of muddled truth, which is just as bad. I shall write to her, and tell her everything, be sure of that ; it will do her good, and I am sure what I have said will do you good also. And I say to you, in solemn, deliberate words, Love her ; don’t be afraid of loving her with that great, noble love which springs up in the heart from deep esteem and admiration—a love which will never be dimmed, and of which, before God and man, you will never be ashamed, as long

as you are both true, and brave, and noble, and stand fast by duty and honour. As I have kissed her, so I kiss you," and Miss Lindsay bent down her face and kissed his pale forehead with a solemn kiss—a kiss of peace—such a kiss of fortitude and endurance as early Christian might have given to early Christian on the road to the amphitheatre. "God bless you!" she murmured as she left him, and she wiped the tears from her eyes as she left the room; but in her heart was the sound of the timbrel and the song of triumph, and so she went out rejoicing.

For several days the landlady marvelled at the ways of Providence, and prayerfully blessed the Lord for the many blessings vouchsafed to her slender larder and her small store of grocery; and she piously traced a very notable analogy between her position and that of the ravens who had so wonderfully ministered to the man of God. The landlady's biblical knowledge was, indeed, very creditable to her spiritual teachers.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS LINDSAY SETTLES IT ONE WAY, AND THE
ENEMY SETTLES IT ANOTHER.

“You’RE welcome to look over my shoulder,” exclaimed Miss Lindsay, contemptuously, as she sat alone in her room writing a letter to Mabel Vaughan. “Of course, I know you will look, whether you are welcome or not; your conduct’s all of a piece, mean, contemptible, and tricky. That bottle of old cognac, filled up with water—though I put in a patent cork with a padlock stopper as a precaution against thieving—do you think Margaret Lindsay is such an arrant fool as not to know what good brandy is? I was to give the invalid that stuff, was I? and

she was to drink the brandy, that precious landlady, was she? Every little sup a curse on her soul. Stop you with a padlock, indeed! I only wish one could discover a patent.

“Why can’t you try to be a little grand? you are playing for big stakes—immortal souls. That poor landlady’s soul; she must have a soul somewhere, I suppose, or you would not play for it; but I can only perceive a stomach, Heaven help her! It’s wretched work, though; you were grander once—principalities and powers, and great dominions—I suppose it’s the dirty work which has degraded you, miserable beings like that woman, without a single grand hope or a single grand desire, and therefore without the chance of a great temptation. A prince once, recollect; you’ve had to descend very low to catch people of that sort; you’ve had to grovel to their grovelling—ground bait and worms for that sort of fishing!—and when one thinks how mean is human meanness, how

small is human smallness, how petty is human pettiness, no wonder that low habits have become ingrained in your very nature.

“It must be poor work, though, fishing for these mean souls; dull, listless sport, this punt-fishing for eternity. No wonder you long for grander natures—my noble girl, hey? and that invalid boy upstairs, who has got the ring of the true metal in him? Never! never! as long as Margaret Lindsay has life and strength. A jewel for your crown, hey, that girl’s soul?—grand any way, for good or evil—for good, for good, I say!” and Miss Lindsay thumped the table emphatically. “Come, here are my cards; look at them!” she exclaimed, in a tone of contempt; “all above board, no deceit or cheating, though you’ll hardly credit that, when one talks about cards to you; none of your cursed aces under the table, little bits of pasteboard with the crests of hell.

“Listen! he and I leave here on Monday next, eleven o’clock train, Southampton to

Waterloo ; at Waterloo my cousin Rachel meets us—you know my cousin Rachel well enough, and she knows you—so none of your tricks with Rachel, it won't do ; there's the same fighting blood in both of us ; you'd best remember that. Rachel will take him right through to Bishopsgate Station, and then straight away down to Yarmouth. Rachel is as good a hand as I am at beef-tea, and she won't leave her work undone. There, that's the programme, the Lord willing. I return home to Dulwich, and I shall tell my girl all I have done—word of mouth, mind, none of those cursed letters for you to thrust under people's noses, but words of comfort in the ear. You'll listen, of course ; I don't care one button if you do, because I mean to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and I defy you to weave mischief out of stuff like that."

Mabel's letters formed another source of happiness to Miss Lindsay. "Read, by all means," she was accustomed to exclaim, in

her sarcastic manner, as she tore open the envelope ; “ you are quite welcome to read every word, though I’ll be bound you’ve already read the letter, just as you always read my letters, mean hound as you are, over my shoulder as I write.”

With regard to one letter in particular Miss Lindsay was very triumphant, though she read it with tears in her eyes. It was an outpouring of Mabel’s affection and gratitude. Miss Lindsay’s life had been such a stern fight—a life, for the most part, of rebuke and admonition, victorious oftentimes, but as a rule only eliciting respect or even fear—that an emphatic expression of love was infinitely precious to her.

“ You true darling friend,” commenced the letter, “ I only wish I could write all I feel. The sense that you are caring for him and watching him through his severe illness and debility, has taken away that dead weight from my heart ; the assurance that he will hear the truth from one who

will speak every syllable ; the knowledge that he will once more know me and think of me as you know me and think of me— Ah, you cannot tell the relief that all this is to my heart and soul ; the dreadful impulse that maddened me has passed away. Believe me, I am very grateful. Thank God, my gratitude for that salvation has softened my heart. I do really love, I tell you honestly, I *do* love my husband ; he perceives it, I know he does, and we breathe a different air now. No longer, Heaven be praised, am I constrained by that hard, cruel sense of duty, but at last by love. Not, indeed, that great full love of which I have dreamt, but still love, not duty. Oh, if you only knew the difference of those two words to me ; the difference of light and darkness. I repeat, I can't write what I feel, but I shall be able to tell you all when you return, with my arms round your neck, and my heart close to your kind, noble heart."

"The Lord be praised !" cried Miss Lind-

say, speaking through her tears. "Read it, I say, again and again; as often as ever you like—shame upon you!" and she held up the letter, waving it triumphantly like a flag. "We have won the victory! not your jewel, you grovelling serpent—not yours, too good for you!—but His! His gold, tried in the furnace, ay, seven times. Praise be to Him who giveth us the victory!"

It was indeed a victory well-nigh down the whole line, Miss Lindsay's campaign at Southampton. There was just one slight check—it is perhaps scarcely worth while recording the fact—in which the enemy contrived to hold his own—the landlady. In the flush of general triumph, on the moment of leaving the lodging-house—indeed in the hall itself—Miss Lindsay suddenly unmasked a battery against picking and stealing, and petty lying and false speaking. The landlady, slinking down, as was her wont, on the hall chair, into a huddled mass like an octopus, quickly entrenched herself behind strong rocky

fragments of gospel love and carnal regeneration, predestination, and election. She grew very red in the face, and rude also of speech, as far as oppressive wheeziness permitted verbal expression. Miss Lindsay, like a prescient general, soon perceived the hopelessness of her attack, and after firing a parting volley of tracts upon the door-mat, by way of covering the retreat, retired to her fly, and they drove off to the station.

It was a bright morning, and Southampton Water glittered pleasantly through the rifts in the pearly sea mist, with yachts and other small craft bobbing lazily at anchor; but Miss Lindsay's eyes were not given to natural beauty, she was, moreover, smarting somewhat under a sense of discomfiture. "Pooh! I don't call that a victory," she cried, scornfully. "I know I was a fool for my pains. I've told you fifty times it's no use my fighting when you've crammed their poor mean, contemptible souls full of lies, and cant, and hypocrisy; but it's nothing to brag about, I can tell you, a miserable,

mean, grovelling woman's soul like your precious landlady's—if, indeed, you can call a stomach a soul."

The journey prospered all the way to Waterloo, and the invalid really bore it wonderfully; not a bit more fatigued than might be fairly expected. The tickets were taken as usual at Vauxhall, and Miss Lindsay was in the highest spirits at the success of her arrangements. "You'll soon see your new nurse, Mr. Foster," she exclaimed, cheerfully. "I'm sure you'll like my cousin Rachel."

"That I'm sure I shall," answered Foster, "if she's only one half as good as you are."

"She's better," rejoined Miss Lindsay—"a better nurse; and as for that fellow, I believe he's more afraid of Rachel than he is of me; she's shorter and sharper with him, and that's what he wants."

Foster could not resist smiling; but when he caught the responding expression in Miss Lindsay's face, he begged her pardon warmly.

“I know you don't believe in him,” said Miss Lindsay, in a tone of sorrow.

“I believe in you, dear lady,” exclaimed Foster, earnestly. “I know you are good and true, and you have restored my old faith.”

“But you must try to believe in him,” she answered, seriously, “with your whole heart and soul. You can never hope to be good, or virtuous, or heavenly-minded—you can never hope for salvation—unless you believe firmly in him. Oh, Mr. Foster, it will be a joyful day for me, it will be a happy day for you, when you can say with perfect truth and sincerity, ‘I believe in the devil and all his works.’ Oh, pray earnestly for this blessed faith—earnestly,” she added, with great fervour.

As the train was slowly approaching the platform, a porter thrust his head in at the window, and, addressing Miss Lindsay, inquired her name.

“Lindsay,” she rejoined.

“Here's a telegram, ma'am, just arrived;”

and the man handed the envelope to Miss Lindsay. She quickly tore it open.

"Beast!" she exclaimed, after glancing at the contents.

"Anything wrong?" inquired Foster, anxiously.

"Little Billy, Rachel's boy, has got the scarlet fever," rejoined Miss Lindsay, in a tone of great irritation. "It's not the child's fault, of course; it's that scoundrel's work, I know it is. Of course Rachel can't have you at her house."

"I must go to some hotel for the time," observed Foster, somewhat wearily.

"Hotels, fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Miss Lindsay. "Who's fool enough to waste money on London hotels?—'limited,' hey—in everything but the prices? Don't talk, let me think," she added abruptly.

The lines of Miss Lindsay's short cogitation were revealed by sundry ejaculations of "beast," "scoundrel," "hound," "serpent," uttered in a low tone, highly perplexing to the porter, but thoroughly

comprehensible to Foster. At last Miss Lindsay had mastered the situation. "Call a cab," she exclaimed briefly. With the assistance of the porter, Foster was comfortably ensconced in the cab, and the luggage having been evolved by Miss Lindsay's rapid glance from the confused mass of packages, the cab was ordered to drive to Dulwich.

"Don't you believe in him now?" asked Miss Lindsay, triumphantly. "It's all his miserable dodge to bring you two together, the scoundrel! He shan't do it, I say, and that's flat to his face. I shall take you to my house for the time. If he's fool enough to think that a mere question of distance settles a question of right or wrong, why, let him. The gulf of honour which separates you two is not a matter of miles—we shall teach him that; but surely all this knavery must prove his existence to any candid mind."

In her fervent desire to inculcate the evidences of her faith, Miss Lindsay had

almost forgotten her duties as nurse. The invalid had become very exhausted. Miss Lindsay, somewhat anxious, induced him to take a little brandy, and she tenderly supported his head on her arm as he lay back in the cab, with his eyes closed in the doze of exhaustion.

“Weaker than we thought,” murmured Miss Lindsay; and perhaps the thought, which was easy enough for her to cope with in the flush of triumph, that same question of distance, was a sickening thought in the heart of the invalid. So close—less than half a mile from house to house—and yet the wide gulf of honour lay betwixt him and the woman he loved.

It was a long, jolty drive. Miss Lindsay sat in the cab with the invalid’s head resting on her left shoulder, while she fanned him with the “Brazen Vessel,” gathered up like a fan, and there fell upon her at last a certain weariness of spirit. “It’s hard work always fighting,” she murmured; “and I shall never be rid of the armour

till they lay me in my grave. I wish we were all comfortably dead and buried—ten feet of clean, dry gravel between us and temptation. No, I don't!" she exclaimed, after a few moments' pause, with an involuntary jerk which shook the invalid. "No, I don't, you scoundrel. Margaret isn't half tired out yet. Don't you flatter yourself. Margaret means to fight it out to the last; 'never say die' was Bob's motto, and Margaret means to stick to it."

At last the journey was accomplished. The invalid, after a prompt administration of restoratives, was left at rest on the sofa in Miss Lindsay's sitting-room, while that lady, assisted by the servant girl, made needful preparation for his reception in the spare-room. It was, of course, a work of some little time, as Foster's visit was entirely unexpected. Matters being duly set *en train*, Miss Lindsay, after giving strict injunctions to the servant to watch the invalid from time to time, sallied forth on a double mission—first, to summon her

medical attendant: and, secondly, to inform Mabel that she must be forbidden the house.

“We shall do perfectly well,” said Miss Lindsay, tauntingly, in the course of her walk, “notwithstanding the mean trick you have put upon us. Indeed, I rather prefer having him under my charge until he is quite restored. It’s ridiculous of you, though, to persist in this manner; you ought to know by this time the stuff those two are made of. It’s a loss of time, take my word for it; there are lots of respectable people you could net with one-tenth the trouble. But I suppose it’s no use talking common sense to you,” she added, with a sneer; “I suppose the fools you’ve dealt with have taught you obstinacy.”

There was some little delay before Miss Lindsay could see the doctor and impress upon him the necessity of an immediate visit; at length, however, she reached Mr. Vaughan’s house.

“I shall have no difficulty with her, poor

girl," thought Miss Lindsay, as she waited with quiet confidence on the doorstep: "she will feel the sacred obligation she is under not to visit me for the present; and, thank Heaven, there is now some little real love between her husband and herself."

"Mrs. Vaughan at home?" inquired Miss Lindsay of the man who opened the door.

"No, ma'am, Mrs. Vaughan went out about half an hour ago; she left a message, in case you called, to say that she had gone to your house."

"My house, God forbid!" exclaimed Miss Lindsay, in a voice of terror.

"Yes, ma'am, your house."

Miss Lindsay's breath grew very short: she turned away, and with hurried steps left the door.

"Heaven forgive me! I ought never to have left home; I ought to have written, but I didn't dare write. Oh, you scoundrel! I shall be crazy indeed if you out-general me now. Those two together—oh, the

scandal and the shame!" Miss Lindsay's very strength was lost in her intense agitation. There was an empty fly in the road. "Drive me," she gasped.

"Can't, ma'am," answered the driver, lolling lazily on his box and flicking the flies in the hot sun.

"Only half a mile, for Heaven's sake!" she implored.

"Can't, ma'am, I say; engaged."

Miss Lindsay turned abruptly from the man. "You villain!" she exclaimed, in a towering passion; "don't you interfere between the driver and me; I won't have it."

"Who's a-interferin'?" asked the man, looking round from his seat, in the belief that Miss Lindsay was addressing some one behind the carriage.

"Never mind him," rejoined Miss Lindsay, "only attend to me. Here's five shillings." The man was silent.

"Ten shillings!" There was no response. "I'll make it a pound."

"Jump in," cried the driver, leaping from

his box and opening the door ; “ one pound, all square. Be quick though : if my gent catches me taking a double job, he’s a very devil, and he’s got the gout besides ; but to refuse a whole pound is like flying in the face of Providence.”

Miss Lindsay gave her address, and the man closed the door. “ Oh, you beast,” she cried, with tears of vexation, “ to rob me in this barefaced manner ! first that landlady, and now this flyman.” But before the driver could mount the box, a loud voice exclaimed, “ Fly ! fly ! driver ! here, hi ! what the deuce ? confound you ! ”

“ Jump out, ma’am,” cried the driver in a voice of great alarm ; “ I shall catch it hot in another moment ; ” and Miss Lindsay was forced, in stress of the driver’s terror, to beat a summary retreat.

Alas, there was no help for it ; a tradesman’s cart, any sort of vehicle, she would have gladly paid any price ; but she was forced, with palpitating heart and shortened breath, to trudge home through hot sun and dust.

“Mean hound,” she protested angrily, “to make me lose all that valuable time talking to that flyman; another of your cursed tricks.”

Very hot, very flurried, and almost breathless was Miss Lindsay when she at last reached home; she hurried up the garden path as fast as her failing breath would allow. The French windows of her sitting-room, where she had left Frank Foster, were wide open, the windows through which Mabel Vaughan had been accustomed to enter the house unannounced. A sickening feeling of apprehension clogged her steps. Suddenly there was a loud shriek of anguish—Mabel’s voice! She flew to the window, and halting on the threshold, gazed into the room, but she quickly started back in blank dismay. “You scoundrel,” she gasped, “this is your infernal work!”

CHAPTER VII.

A DRAWN BATTLE AFTER ALL.

THERE was a pretty sharp tussle in the matter of life and death over the insensible body of Frank Foster. He lay on the floor, and Mabel Vaughan was raising his head when Miss Lindsay entered the room. There was no time for talking or explanation, it was a question of brandy and pungent salts, and rubbings of the feet and bathings of the temples—all hands had to go to work, no matter whose. The servant had to be scurried off to fetch the doctor, “by main force, if needful,” exclaimed Miss Lindsay with determined energy, and Miss Lindsay and Mabel did their best to combat

the onslaught of death. The rights and wrongs of things social, the nice measurings of propriety, had to be laid aside in the urgency of the occasion. There was, indeed, no need of any talking between the two women, for they both possessed common sense and experience, and they worked with an intuitive sense of the right and proper thing to be done. They did well, and death was baffled before the doctor came. When the doctor came into the presence of the invalid, his countenance—Mabel watched it intently—quickly became anxious.

“He ought not to have been allowed to travel,” he murmured. “Let him remain where he is for a time—don’t attempt to remove him to his room at present; he requires careful watching.”

The doctor gave strict injunctions as to the frequent administration of restoratives.

“We can do nothing more at present than keep him quiet?” asked Miss Lindsay.

“Nothing,” replied the doctor.

“Is it a very critical state?” inquired Mabel, in an anxious voice.

“Critical, certainly, but I believe hopeful,” was the rejoinder.

Miss Lindsay whispered a few words in the doctor's ear, and the doctor took his seat at the sofa-side of the patient; Miss Lindsay then laid her hand on Mabel's arm with gentle pressure, but yet with a pressure that was irresistible, and led her towards the door. On the threshold, Mabel turned, and for the moment stood motionless, but she yielded again to the gentle but irresistible pressure, and Miss Lindsay led her into the half-furnished drawing-room at the back of the house. As soon as she was in the room and the door was closed, Mabel broke away from Miss Lindsay's hand, and bursting into tears, flung herself upon the sofa and strove to stifle her sobs by burying her head in the cushions. With simultaneous movement, when Mabel left her, Miss Lindsay fell on her knees in an attitude of prayer. At first she prayed inaudibly,

but gradually, as the violence of Mabel's sorrow abated, she prayed aloud from time to time in fervent, passionate tones. "Oh, Lord, come and help us to do what is right—come and help your servant Mabel, the woman I love, and with great might protect her. You know far better than I do how desperately she has been tried: give her strength to fight bravely against this snare of the devil—give her help by turning towards her the hearts of all those at her home, so that they may in this hour of temptation especially love her, and honour her, and respect her—even as I love her, and honour her, and respect her. Oh, Lord, save and protect her, by putting your almighty love, which is so strong to save, into all their hearts. Let that love be her refuge and sure castle of defence. Amen."

Miss Lindsay rose to her feet, and going to the sofa, sat down by Mabel's side; she clasped Mabel's hand in hers, but she did not speak. Mabel bent down her head, and Miss Lindsay kissed her forehead, but the

wound was too large for the healing power of even that kiss ; and though Mabel threw her arms round Miss Lindsay's neck and clung passionately to her, as it were heart to heart, no balm of comfort was vouchsafed, and Miss Lindsay, with ready perception, was sensible of the failure of the old consolation. She did not, however, attempt to speak, and gradually Mabel, with a deep sigh of despondency, drew apart from her, and sat, or almost crouched, at the end of the sofa. But Mabel could not resist telling her story, or, rather, urging her apology or defence ; she spoke for the most part in a low voice which almost fell into a wail of sorrow, though at times, in stress of violent emotion, her voice reached a high pitch of painful incisiveness. "I came to see you—I did not know, I could not know, that he was in that room, or even in this house." Miss Lindsay bowed her head in assent.

"It was a fearful surprise—he was dozing when I entered ; he never saw me. Could

I help looking at him?" she asked, passionately—"could I help that? God forgive me. When he stirred—when he awoke—I flew behind the green screen. I watched him try to rise—oh, so feeble, so very feeble—try to reach the hand-bell: he would have seen me if I had left the screen to call for help or reach the bell. In the sight of God it was my duty and my right to fly to his side, to help him, to hold him in my arms—I know that; but not in man's sight. I did not stir from the screen—on my sacred word I never stirred. I watched all his efforts: he struggled to his feet—oh, horrible agony! I knew he must fall—but I—I—— He did fall! Oh, my God, his head against that sharp table—senseless or dead—and then I flew to his side. Did I do well?" she asked, breaking into a half-hysterical laugh. "Did I do my duty as a wedded wife? Dead or senseless, I had let him fall—but he never saw me—his eyes never met mine—never, never, I swear. Dead or senseless, the man I love

—the man God meant me to marry, to love and cherish in sickness and in health. Yes, I have done very well—very well!” and many a time did she repeat those words “very well,” mingling them with that sad hysterical laugh.

Miss Lindsay sat gaunt and impassive throughout Mabel's narrative, with her eyes staring for the most part fixedly across the room; she made no response to Mabel's words.

“Betsy Brown is my woman!” she exclaimed suddenly; “first-rate for nursing. I'll write to Betsy at once; Betsy can't read a word, thank God. It's made her senses all the sharper, like blind people. She never went to school or learnt her catechism, but God taught her conscientiousness and truth-telling, so she's first-rate at that. Not many of His scholars about, worse luck. She can't sleep o' nights when she's nursing because her conscience won't let her, which is stronger than green tea. A line to Betsy put into the post before five—she'll get it to-night.”

Miss Lindsay started up from the sofa, and going to the writing-table, hastily wrote off a note.

“ You’ll just be in time, Mabel, if you look sharp, to catch the five o’clock post ; I can’t send the girl. Quick though ! it’s everything to get Betsy. Good-bye, darling, I must go and relieve Dr. Burney ; ” and with a hurried kiss Miss Lindsay bustled out of the room. She shed some tears when she was alone in the passage. “ Poor girl ! it’s a great burden,” she murmured ; “ Thou knowest why, Lord, Thou knowest why—I don’t, I don’t ! ” and hastily brushing the tears from her eyes, she entered the presence of the invalid and released the doctor from his charge.

Mabel hurried off to the post ; the office lay on her way home. She reached it almost breathless, and by a few minutes contrived to save the five o’clock collection ; and then what and whither ? The moment the letter fell into the box, thought began. At first she resolved to go back to

Miss Lindsay's; she *must* see him again; she *would* see him again, no earthly power should stop her; and for a hundred yards back towards Miss Lindsay's house did this resolution hurry her, and then its strength paled away in the fear of Miss Lindsay's refusal. How could she combat that? What if Miss Lindsay told her that it would compromise the reputation of her house—nay, even of Miss Lindsay's character in the neighbourhood? And then the pain, too, that denial would cause to Miss Lindsay's own heart, and Miss Lindsay had been such a true and loving friend to him and to her—nay, was even now fighting the battle of life and death on his behalf. She ceased walking and stood still for a few moments; an equipoise of agonizing doubt. But see him again she must, he was probably dying; surely her husband, when he knew that, would let her go; the man she loved was dying, her husband would no longer have a rival to fear—just a few last minutes, just a few last words on the brink

of death, that was all she wanted; it was a boon that her husband would surely grant. Let her only gain that permission, and Miss Lindsay would admit her without let or hindrance into Frank Foster's presence; then let her gain that easy permission without delay; and so she hurried on once more towards her own home. Her argument remained palpably clear and cogent in her mind until she entered the house, and then quite suddenly its force grew dulled. "Please, ma'am, Mr. Vaughan has been asking for you several times," the servant said as he opened the door; "and Mrs. Corley has called, and has been sitting with master for some time; she's only just gone."

Mabel remembered with alarm the long period of her absence; added to this, Mrs. Corley's visits never boded any good; and before she entered her husband's room—she did not wait to take off her hat and scarf—the strong argument had grown utterly weak and futile.

"Where on earth have you been to all this time?" Jacob inquired, in a tone of peevish injury.

"Only to see Miss Lindsay," she faltered, with a flushed face.

"I hear Miss Lindsay called to see you."

"We missed one another; and when she got home—I thought it was best to wait for her—she had so much to tell me that I quite forgot the hour. I am very sorry, dear, for having been out so long," she added, humbly, "you'll forgive me, won't you?" but she did not dare to utter one word with regard to Frank Foster.

"What the deuce had Miss Lindsay to tell you?"

"All about her visit to Southampton—and fifty things."

"What did she go to Southampton for?" he asked in a brusque tone.

"Oh—why, I suppose," stammered Mabel, "change of air, you know."

"Hum, well," he muttered, "change of air—no matter; now read. You had man-

aged to forget your afternoon reading with all this chattering to Miss Lindsay, and you know it's a duty, as well as a consolation to me," he added reproachfully. "How you can be so fond of that woman I can't for the life of me understand, she always says something bitter every time I see her; now your sister Mary is always so good and kind and hopeful, and so is Mr. Simeon: I won't have you so fond of that Miss Lindsay—I don't believe in her, I say."

"Oh, Jacob," remonstrated Mabel, "she is one of the truest and best women that ever lived; I'm sure she's always trying to make me good and do my duty. Don't speak hardly of her, don't dear—I beg and pray."

"Well, read, read!" he exclaimed petulantly. "Why don't you begin?"

Mabel, with her burdened conscience, grew alarmed at his manner; she hurriedly took the book and commenced reading. As was her wont, her voice rose and fell with the thunderings of divine wrath, with the forked lightnings of divine vengeance,

with the awful narrowness of divine mercy, with the terrible sublimity of an universe lost for the sake of an elect few. Jacob liked it; they told him his salvation was sure, if he would only believe; he was only too delighted to believe, and he was thoroughly fascinated by the sublime exclusiveness of his promised salvation.

Mabel's mind quickly left the printed words that her tongue uttered by mere automatic action, and the recollection of the past afternoon (she little witted the terrible storm that was brewing beneath her husband's petulance) forced itself into her mind, and the anxieties of her heart fled to that sofa in Miss Lindsay's parlour, to that hard fight for life which she had fought with Frank Foster's head resting on her bosom. At last her thoughts grew so intrusive that they entirely destroyed her power of mechanical reading; in sudden fright, she endeavoured to recover her place on the page; the words danced hopelessly before her eyes, and she burst into a violent flood of tears.

“Ah!” cried Jacob, vindictively, “laid hold of at last, hey? terrible words for the sinner, and the lukewarm, and the deceitful, and the liar.”

She made no reply, she tried hard to stifle her sobs; panting for breath, she threw aside the lace shawl which she had not removed on entering the house.

“Conscience, hey?” he said, tauntingly; “touched at last!” and he gazed at her vindictively. “Come here!” he shrieked, suddenly; “here, I say!”

“What do you want?” she asked with alarm.

“Here, to me!” She came close to him, trembling at the violence of his manner. He thrust out his hand and clutched the bosom of her dress. “What’s that?—that?” he shrieked.

“What do you mean?” she rejoined in surprise and dismay.

“That blood—that blood on your dress!” She glanced downwards; there were stains of blood on her muslin dress.

"I don't know," she stammered, and the room whirled before her eyes.

"Yes, blood, I swear! Show me your hands." He clutched her hands with violence. "No cut, no wound! Whose blood? whose blood?" With sudden action he tore open her dress at the bosom. She strove to break away from his grasp. "Not your blood! Whose blood?" he screamed, in a fresh access of fury. "Whose blood, I say? I will have an answer, lie or truth!"

"Oh, Jacob, have mercy, have patience with me—not this fearful rage. I have done nothing wrong—before God, nothing wrong!" She sank on her knees at his bedside, and clasped his hands. "God help me now!" she muttered.

"Whose blood?" he cried, with unabated rage.

"Frank Foster's!" she exclaimed, almost involuntarily, and she started to her feet, terror-stricken by the avowal which had been wrung from her lips.

“I believe you!” he shrieked, vindictively; “no lie now—no lie now!”

“He is an invalid; he had fallen to the ground through weakness—he struck his head against the table,” she gasped with painful utterance.

“Ah, ah!” Jacob laughed, derisively; “and you took him in your arms, his head in your bosom! So, so, the truth at last!”

“Not the truth—not the whole truth,” she answered.

“Truth enough; I want no more.”

“You *must* hear it!” she cried, her face growing crimson with horror at the imputation cast upon her. “Miss Lindsay went to nurse him at Southampton—it was a question of life or death.”

“Enough, I say!”

“But you must and shall hear me! She brought him to London, having arranged for him to proceed immediately, without breaking the journey, to Yarmouth; the arrangement failed at the last moment, and she was obliged to take him home to her own

house. I never knew he was there—on my sacred word, I never knew it.”

“Liar!” he shrieked.

“No, before God, Jacob, I never knew it! Miss Lindsay called here to warn me not to go to her house.”

“But you went there—you went there the moment he arrived—you can’t deny it—it’s all a trick and a lie—you false, wicked wife!”

“Have mercy on me, Jacob!” and again she fell on her knees at his side. “Oh, not those awful words!” she cried, piteously; “you don’t know how much I suffer—you don’t know how sadly I have been tried. Oh, give me a little kindness, a little love—it would be so precious to me now! Be my true friend as well as husband; help me in this awful trial; let me tell you the whole truth; let me cling to you for advice and love.”

Once more Jacob had his chance. At that moment, as she humbly knelt at his side, amid her tears and her bitter anguish, he

could have won her heart and made her truly his; a very little would have been enough—a little love and a little generosity, and she would have flung at his feet the wealth of her great heart and her noble nature. A woman was kneeling to him, but an angel had verily come to Jacob, and was praying for admission to his heart—praying for leave to love him, and afford him great solace; but Jacob was lashed and blinded by dire jealousy; his heart was, moreover, very small, very mean, very petty—there was no room for a great love or a great faith in that little heart.

“But you love him?” persisted Jacob, in answer to her appeal. “Out with it, I say; the truth, the truth.”

“It would not be the whole truth if I denied it,” she replied, in trembling accents.

“Curse you! I’ll hear no more,” he exclaimed, with renewed fury.

“But he’s dying, Jacob!” she cried, piteously; “ask the doctor—Dr. Burney says it is a most critical case.”

"I'm glad of that," he answered; "before heaven, I'm glad of that." His words were emphasised with concentrated bitterness.

She shuddered, but she made no reply.

"And you'd like to nurse him, hey?" he asked, tauntingly, after a moment's pause.

"Miss Lindsay will do that."

"But you'd like to go and see him?" he added, in the same taunting tone.

"I should, indeed I should," she answered, vehemently, for she could not resist snatching at his words, although she well knew the cruelty of his meaning. "Oh, Jacob, let me go—the last time, a very few words—the last time before he dies."

"Go, pray go," he cried, with increased anger, "you are quite free to go."

"Alas, you don't mean it," she answered, sorrowfully.

"I do, on my soul I do. You can open the street door easily enough. I am lying helpless here—go, I say; but, mark me, you will never return. Well, why don't

you start?" he continued, in that same tone of vindictive taunt. "A beggar, hey? No money, hey? Ha, ha!—the old man's money bags, hey?" and he laughed with a laugh that pierced her heart.

She had risen from his side; he was quickly driving her mad with those shameful taunts.

"Sister Corley put me up to your lies and tricks. She saw him arrive. She saw you go to the house, and then she came and told me the whole truth. Well—go, go."

The reference to Mrs. Corley was the last weight in the adverse scale. "Mrs. Corley!" exclaimed Mabel, bitterly. "Jacob Vaughan, I take you at your word—I will go. God forgive you, it's your work, you have driven me away." She turned from him.

"Go, and be a beggar," he exclaimed, savagely, "and worse, and welcome. But the Torquay people! What, beggars too? Not a penny of mine—villa and all, sold up, every stick. Go! go!" he shrieked vindictively.

His words struck home, and she sank to the floor without making any response.

“Ha, ha!” he laughed with exultation. “The end of your tether, hey? The chain was strong enough—I knew that! Do you think I was such a fool as to marry a fine young girl like you without a strong chain to keep you in bounds? No, no. Jacob Vaughan was wiser than that. Mark me, you are my wife, and you shall remain my wife, true and faithful, and obedient to the end of my life, and then you shall remain my widow to the end of your life. No new husband shall ever touch my money. A new husband, and the money, every penny, goes away—if you marry, you’ll be a beggar. I’ll warrant the husbands will keep away. Ah, ah! you wouldn’t mind being a beggar, of course not; but the Torquay people will be my trustees, for if you marry again they will be beggars too. My will is sure to be obeyed.”

She made no answer to his words. Their cruelty and their shame indeed wounded

her deeply; but in her firm conviction, Frank Foster was dying, and therefore the threat in itself had no terror for her. The thought of ever marrying any one else was absolutely abhorrent, and utterly foreign to her soul.

Jacob exulted in his triumph. "Come, get up," he cried, "and finish that reading. Obey, I tell you." The victory was assured; she rose at his bidding; she was utterly crushed in soul, and oppressed, moreover, by a vague sense of sin; it was entirely out of her power to make any rejoinder to his words, and she resumed her reading in humble obedience to his command.

There was a lull in the theological thunder—divine mercy and divine love for a short space irradiated the pages of the book, albeit duly circumscribed by special and jealously-guarded limitations; but Jacob could not forget his triumph, and it delighted him ever and anon to jeer at his victim's helplessness, and fling the Tor-

quay threat in all its potency in her face. She kept her eyes closely fixed on the book, and when his cruel talk ceased she continued her reading, and in her own heart she cursed the words of mercy which her tongue was forced to utter.

Miss Lindsay's wise and merciful prayer had not been answered. No saving gift of love from her husband had been vouchsafed to help her. Her own love for parents and sister had indeed made her his slave, but his cruelty had brutalized her soul. The fine ducts and channels of conscience were choked up, congested by a sense of cruelty and wrong. The motive alone of that love for parents and sister, old from the days of childhood, restrained her from turning fiercely upon him, from answering bitter words with bitter words, from defying cruelty and taunt by a scornful acceptance of sin and shame; *à outrance*, in all the strength of her powerful nature, wrought to a pitch of despair.

Presently he called sharply to her.

“Come here, here!” She started up from her chair, and almost involuntarily shrank away from him in the recollection of that cruel grip at her bosom.

“Here, come here—oh, God, the pain!” he cried.

She saw by the expression of his face that he must be suffering intense pain; her anger and her wrongs were instantly forgotten in that sight of anguish, and she flew to his side with anxious sympathy and concern.

“Oh, Jacob! what is it?” She threw her arms round him, and strove to raise him up.

“Don’t touch me; don’t touch me,” he groaned.

“What do you feel?” she asked with terror.

“You’ve done it,” he muttered, writhing with agony; “done it at last. Killed me! killed me! Oh, God!” he shrieked, starting forward, and then he fell back in her arms.

“Jacob, for Heaven’s sake, have mercy!” she cried in piteous protest.

There was no answer to her prayer; the prerogative of mercy had been denied for ever to Jacob Vaughan.

She felt dreadfully terrified, but she did not know that he was dead. She flew to the bell, rang it violently, and turned immediately to go to his bedside. She knew then that he was dead; the awful stillness told her that—the awful lull in that storm of passion; but the words “killed me, killed me,” echoed in her ears—irrevocable now, ineffaceable by any prayer, final in all their cruelty and injustice—the lips immovable, and the eyes fixed.

“Killed me! killed me!” she cried in her misery; but the dead face triumphed in its stony obstinacy over the fervour of her living anguish, and once more she sank down helpless to the floor.

So Jacob Vaughan died; killed by a violent access of jealousy. The doctors

defined it clearly enough, spasmodic affection of the heart, and the technical phrase they used was still more effective, and sounded fuller in the ears; and their statement was true enough, but there was a truth beyond that truth. He died because he was mean, and petty, and ungenerous. He was literally slain through the very nobleness of the woman whose hand he had bought with his gold. Her nature was too grand for his; the two natures had been flung together, and the greater had destroyed the less.

Dr. Burney told Miss Lindsay, after a second visit to Frank Foster that evening, that he thought the patient would pull through in the end; of course he would require great care and very careful nursing; the sort of nursing, in fact, that he was sure to obtain at Miss Lindsay's hands. This hopeful communication fell somewhat sadly on Miss Lindsay's soul; not that her zeal and energy on behalf of the invalid had in one jot abated, or were in any danger of

abating; but in her eyes death was a very small evil in comparison with sin—indeed, as far as her own feelings were concerned, it meant rest and peace. She felt with sadness that she had been worsted in the fight; that the evil one had out-manceuvred her with his infernal schemes; and it seemed to her that death alone could now cut the knot of entanglement.

“I know what you mean to be at,” she murmured, sadly, as she watched at Frank Foster’s side; “you mean to harden that husband’s heart against her with his mad, senseless jealousy. Fight fair, you scoundrel, and I shouldn’t mind; but you mean, through his hard, cruel words, to drive her to despair and sin.

“Oh God,” she cried, fervently, “don’t let her be tempted in this cruel way! You know how good she is; only let her heart be touched by love, and she’ll never swerve one inch from duty and right. Come and help us, it’s a bad business, and I’m at my wits’ end; only, come quickly, Lord;” and

in the fervour of her heart, and her great love for Mabel, her words were involuntarily uttered in a reproachful tone of impatience. She sought for ready help; and, in her excited feelings, the divine assistance seemed to move so slowly; she wanted it to run.

In the course of the evening the news came to Miss Lindsay that Jacob Vaughan had died suddenly.

There was something awful in the thought, although Vaughan's death was the assurance of Mabel's salvation. Nevertheless, it did seem very awful to Miss Lindsay, in her deep sense of the reality of divine interposition, that the answer vouchsafed to her prayer should be the sudden death of Jacob Vaughan; and she was humbled likewise in the thought, that a doubtful combat waged with her weapons of moral and religious force had, after all, resulted in a drawn battle through the intervention of a great catastrophe—safety, indeed, but not triumph.

It's the Lord's doing," she said, addressing her antagonist; "it's not my victory, I know that. I don't mean to boast—you were running us very close; it's over now, and you can go. His victory, not mine;" and in this spirit, she refrained from all parting shots of triumph at the retiring foe.

"Ah, me!" she sighed; "it's poor thin stuff, even at the best, this human nature of ours; won't stand wear and tear, or even a good hard day's wash, like those rascally longcloths made of mildew and lies. And yet, and yet," she continued with hesitation—for after all, notwithstanding her despondency, she still clung to her faith in Mabel's character, and pondering a little more, the elasticity of her spirit presently returned—"and yet, I say," and she raised her voice so as to be within earshot of the retiring enemy, "I wish the Lord had let us fight it out to the bitter end. I'm not so sure we should have been beaten, after all. Anyhow, Margaret Lindsay

means fighting any day you like, remember that."

"Tell me," murmured Frank Foster, very feebly, "when I regained my senses this afternoon—it's all a daze from the moment I fell down trying to reach the bell—was Mabel in the room, or is it only a wild fancy?"

"It was Mabel," answered Miss Lindsay, in firm outspoken voice. "She was here by pure accident; she came to see me; she did not know that you were in the house."

"Yes, yes," he answered, eagerly. "Will he let her come and see me?—her husband, I mean—only a few minutes; a few minutes. I'll ask no more."

"You must be very quiet; indeed you must," interposed Miss Lindsay.

"Only a few minutes," he urged, with feverish impatience.

"Perhaps, some day. We'll see when you are better."

"Good, good," he answered. "Promise. Only a few minutes, mind."

She was free to see him. The minutes were hers—the few minutes her soul had desired so eagerly. Minutes, hours, days were at her free disposal now; but Mabel Vaughan did not come.

CHAPTER VIII.

JACOB HOLDS MABEL'S HEART.

FRANK FOSTER, as he lay musing in his great weakness, wondered from time to time why Mabel Vaughan did not come and see him, but Jacob Vaughan, as he lay dead in his room, had won the victory, and he held the heart of the woman who had never loved him, triumphantly against the rival she loved so deeply. Mabel was absolutely free from all external interference ; no living person could now control her actions, but there was one large dark spot on her conscience which ruled her with supreme power,—remorse. She knew that Jacob's words were true,—she had killed him.

There stood the grim fact; she was wholly innocent, indeed, of the method by which he had met his death—the meanness of his nature, and not any guilty act of hers; but none the less Jacob Vaughan was dead, and his death, she felt, lay at her door. She only thought of his death, she did not think of his bitter curse of disinheritance—the question of property was wholly in abeyance; it had paled away before the one terrible thought of death and the guilty burden of death.

Alas! remorse and innocence were linked together. “If I had been untrue,” she protested bitterly; “if I had been unfaithful, if he had known it, and it had killed him, I could have been bitterly sorry, I could have repented, and I should have gained peace and absolution at last—but of what can I repent? Is it my fault that my love for another was true and constant? But that love never led me to disgrace or crime, desperately tempted as I once was, and yet, Heaven knows, it was no low or

base temptation, and I was saved, moreover, by Miss Lindsay's love and mercy, and the very knowledge of that temptation was only known to Miss Lindsay and God."

Nevertheless Jacob Vaughan lay dead, and the burden of his death tortured her soul; and yet he seemed to her not *quite* dead, for there was a smile on his face, and the association of that face with life was still warm in her soul—not yet dust to dust, for then he would be manifestly dead—but a strange, intermediate state. Wholly a fancy indeed, but nevertheless a fancy; she lit a night-light to light the locked room through the dark hours of the night—the grace and sanctity of a little light, though the closed eyes would never open again—but if light, then speech, though the dull ears would never hear.

She stood before him in her wretchedness. "Oh God, have mercy!" she cried. "I never knew what a crime I was committing when I married him. I thought I was doing right in thinking of *them*—I had been

always taught to think of *them*—always self-sacrifice from that day when I was a little child, and they made me give the bit of cake to Mary because she was so ill. I married him for their sakes. I have striven to do my duty as his faithful nurse ever since that awful wedding day—kind and attentive and forbearing to the best of my power and strength—all but telling the truth. A lie would have saved it all, when he wrung the truth from my lips. Why not tell a lie, and so have saved his life with lies? And yet no liar shall inherit eternal life! Oh God! I can't understand this horrible entanglement, but I'm fearfully wretched. Why not," she exclaimed, in tones of sorrowful expostulation, "have let him believe in me? I might have loved him then. Why allow Mrs. Corley to breathe those lying stories in his ear—her lies against my truth? Oh God! what crime have I committed that I should suffer all this agony?" And she sank to the ground sobbing helplessly at the dead man's

side. And then came a period of revulsion and rank rebellion—the burning sense of a great injustice fired her soul. She started to her feet. “He knows the truth now,” she cried in passionate tones; “he knows my truth was true; he knows his death came of his own mad jealousy—that it was no act of mine. I won’t bear this burden. The accusation was false. Before God, I say false. If he chose to nurse that accursed jealousy in his soul, it was his fault, not mine. I say, I won’t endure all this torture. No, Jacob, the truth is recorded above. I repeat I did not kill you!” and she gazed down with unflinching glance on the dead man’s face, and in firm words reiterated again and again her denial of his cruel accusation.

A smile had gathered on the dead man’s lips, and the form of the face had turned back to its youthful aspect. Thus we are reminded sadly or gladly of the bright promise of youth—sometimes fulfilled, and sometimes broken? but there had been no

fair promise in Jacob's youth, so nothing had been broken ; and the smile was a cunning, canny, mean smile. It was his answer to her words—his immovable answer, full of mystery, and triumphant in such mystery ; the stuff that had lain in the depth of his nature—meanness, pettiness, small spite, and faithlessness, had come to the surface at last.

His smile crushed her in the end ; notwithstanding all the fervour of her indignation, she could not outgaze its stony fixity. She covered his face with a shudder, and she left him in his triumph with the night-light burning dimly in the silent room, and she bore away her torturing thoughts, to be dealt with in her own soul by hopeless sorrow and the revulsions of angry protest.

Alleviation came the next day with Mr. Barton, the solicitor, and a new current of thought was established in her mind. The will declared that Jacob Vaughan's property was hers absolutely—every penny, and there were many valuable and prudent invest-

ments—and all goods and chattels whatsoever and wheresoever, plate, jewels, furniture, carriages—all belonged to her.

“No, no,” she answered—“impossible. There must be some other will.”

Mr. Barton assured her that he had only drawn one will for Mr. Vaughan since his marriage; in fact, the will against which he had felt it his duty to protest. He had been, as she well knew, Mr. Vaughan’s confidential adviser. Mr. Vaughan had never taken any important step with regard to business matters without seeking his advice.

“No, no,” she persisted; “there must be another will. I know there must be another will.”

“Tell me all you know,” he asked.

“Just before the fatal seizure, he told me he had made a will binding up all his property.”

“People often talk about making wills without taking action,” answered Mr. Barton, still adhering to his own belief.

She prayed him to search through all the business papers in the house, the desks, all the possible places where such a document might be deposited; she placed the keys in his hands; the old servant who had lived for years with Mr. Vaughan and knew his ways would help in the search.

Mr. Barton took the keys at her request and left the room. She could not accompany him, her agitation was too great for that. What if it should *really* be the truth after all? what if she should really be the sole possessor of all this wealth? Her heart beat with exultation at the thought. "Oh, how glorious—oh God, how glorious to be able to show them what I really am; not the mean, truckling adventuress; not the greedy, selfish wretch they have loved to call me!"

All other thoughts—and be it remembered that a great love was latent in her heart—were merged in that one exulting thought—wealth, so that she might triumph in the scorn of wealth—wealth, so that she

might fling back that intolerable accusation with gifts of gold. Impossible! this triumph could never be hers.

She heard Mr. Barton's step in the passage : she strove to nerve herself for his entrance, and cold perspiration bathed her forehead.

"Well," he said, with quiet assurance, "we can find no other will, and Simpson has opened every possible drawer. I own, I never expected to make any discovery of the sort ; all Mr. Vaughan's valuable papers, his will among them, were kept in our strong room ; he was most methodical with regard to his papers. I repeat, the entire property is yours absolutely."

Her heart seemed to burst with the very immensity of her exultation : then came tears, and gaining her self-possession with great effort, she addressed Mr. Barton in a firm low tone, clasping his hands as she spoke. "I once told you I would only take under such a will what you thought right and just. I solemnly renew that promise ; pardon me, if I speak no more now."

She hurried from the room, and flew upstairs to the dead man's chamber. All, all was hers—hers absolutely ! Oh, that sense of wealth, that sense of the power of wealth—she who had been so recently a slave—it filled her soul with a strange, marvellous feeling, and this feeling was mingled with intense gratitude, and also with remorse and sorrow. She kissed his cold forehead with a fervent kiss, her first gift of a real fervent kiss ; he had won it at last.

“ Oh Jacob, dear Jacob, you loved me, though your words were often harsh ; would to God you had known me better, and trusted me in that one thing, as you have trusted me with this large trust. I will deal truly and honestly with all this wealth ; not one penny more will I take for my own—that I solemnly swear—than I ought in strict justice to take. Your family shall not suffer one jot through your confidence in me. You have given me the power of vindicating my character from all those

cruel accusations, be sure I shall exercise it to the utmost: they shall say, he left everything to his wife because he knew he could trust her to dispose of it with justice." She gasped all this, rather than spoke it, in broken, tearful words. The smile on Jacob's lips served for his response; you might read it as you chose. In her then frame of mind it seemed to her a gracious smile of acquiescence and appreciation; but this was plainly an illusion—it was, of course, the very same smile which had answered her bitter protest. Take them as you will, smiles are difficult to fathom. Other expressions of the face tell their own tale; but behind the smile of the Belle Joconde, who can read the meaning of Leonardo, that riddle of the Renaissance which centuries have failed to solve? And the dead smile of Jacob Vaughan possessed just as much mystery, only it was the smile of a mean, petty, cunning nature.

Mary Smith wrote a very beautiful letter to her sister upon the death of Mr. Vaughan,

full of pious resignation, at the same time irradiated by a certain subdued spirit of religious exultation. It is scarcely gracious to urge any small cavils against its general tone. Perhaps, if it may be permitted to say as much, it erred just here and there in being a little too didactic, and also a little too argumentative; at the same time, as regards general composition, it was a manifest improvement upon earlier epistles, being far more coherent, less broken by abrupt ejaculations, the style more flowing and harmonious, and to all this must be added a greater force of expression and authority. It ought, perhaps, to be stated that there now existed between Mrs. Smith and the Reverend Mr. Simeon a sort of tacit understanding, or rather an understanding arrived at by the most delicate circumlocution, and this agreement was understood by Mary herself (always be it affirmed in the most humble spirit), that Mary's life should in due course (meaning after her decease) be edited and published by the reverend

gentleman. Mary referred very sweetly to the subject when the bare idea was just breathed by her mother. "I would much rather not," she said, "but if my poor, sinful, wicked life can be made an example of godliness for the edification of the congregation of Israel, I will not repine, I will not gainsay; but I am very unworthy." And this was all she said, but she thought a great deal, and the thought was productive of great consolation and support, at the same time it was accompanied with a becoming sense of deep responsibility. She regarded the subject in a very clear and proper light. "I must lead from henceforth a life of religious biography," she said to herself. "My thoughts and actions must all be shaped to this end, everything that I write, and everything that I say, must be written and said with a view to eventual publication. I must distinctly recollect that the feelings of the present must be shaped to future edification; whenever I address the individual, I must remember that I am

addressing many readers of many editions, if such be the will of Heaven."

The death of a brother-in-law was manifestly a very important occasion—the subject would naturally catch the eye in an index—and Mary's letter was accordingly written with a thorough appreciation of its future importance. A right faith, so it asserted, was capable of supporting us throughout all the trials of life—all the difficulties and doubts of life would surely be solved, and, indeed, probably removed by a vital faith (Scriptural of course). This was the main theme of the letter. Hence it was our duty, above all things, to rejoice in a vital faith, to rejoice greatly, as with tabor, and harp, and sackbut, and also with shawms, in the possessors of a vital faith. Dear Mr. Vaughan, we were permitted humbly to hope, had been the possessor of that vast treasure. Let us rejoice, therefore, in that one thought—in that one thought let us be thankfully resigned to his death; dead, ere the precious heritage had

been wrested from him by the wiles of the evil one, or the corruptions of this sinful world; yes, darling Mabel, the letter continued, be assured that to the faithful, humble believer in vital religion, the death of your dear husband ought to be heartily accepted with feelings of cheerful acquiescence. Many very aptly-chosen quotations from Scripture were inserted here and there, some were suggested by Mr. Simeon, who very kindly read over the first draft. He awarded to Mary a full meed of approval, and it is just possible that she thought as much of Mr. Simeon's approbation, as representing the approbation of future thousands, as she did of the present grief that the letter was designed to assuage.

Mr. Smith had been an unimportant man throughout his life; as yet we have seen but little of him—in truth, he and the world had never possessed more than a next-to-nothing sort of acquaintance. He stood somewhere in the background of the family picture, among the deep shadows, a few

strokes sketched in, rather than an elaborated figure. If a play-house simile were not irreverent as applied to such a family, he was not even a "third old man" in his own house, but only a first-class super—his wife and Mary monopolizing the leading rôles—but his opportunity came at last; the funeral of his son-in-law gave him the leading part.

The sense of his daughter's wealth was a revelation to his soul. His whole life had been lived on the confines of necessity; sharp haggling over shillings and sixpences, until these miserable coins at last attained in his mind the status of second-rate divinities. Hitherto, from their godlike eminence, they had frowned relentlessly upon every humble aspiration of his life, but at last he was mercifully permitted by Providence to stand on equal terms even with golden guineas. It was an effort at first to treat guineas with familiarity, but the habit was acquired by use.

Of course, Mary could not go up for the

funeral, and her mother was perforce obliged to remain with her, but it was obviously only right, nay, a bounden duty, that Mr. Smith should pay all the respect in his power to his deceased son-in-law by attending the ceremony. He was only too delighted to go; he was to travel express, first-class, a fly to the station at Torquay, a fly to Balham, a basin of hot soup, and a glass of sherry at Swindon (first-class refreshment room). These are indeed small items wherewith to make up a sum total of happiness, but the restrictions of Mr. Smith's life had been petty, and small things sufficed for a due enjoyment of Christian liberty.

“A gentleman at last!” he murmured in the depths of his soul. The mourning, too, was so thoroughly handsome and becoming; a first-rate Torquay tailor, no bartering as to price, merely insistence upon excellence—excellence of cut and material being external evidence of internal respect. It was only right he should be resigned, even

cheerfully resigned, but he wanted to be buoyant, he had even to restrain himself in the presence of Mary. But he could not resist confessing to his wife the unbecoming extent of his happiness as he was putting on the new black suit (it really was the very best West of England material). "God forgive me," he cried, and the tears stood in his eyes; "'but the Lord has done great things for us whereat I rejoice.' You know, Jane, that all my life long I have never had a pound to play with, or a shilling to throw away, and here's a ten-pound note, and lots more if I want it; and I'm a gentleman at last, as I ought to have been all along, if I had had my rights."

"Mrs. Smith could not find it in her heart to be angry with him. "Mary mustn't hear you," she said, anxiously; but she too cried, and she felt very happy; it was the first real genuine bit of truth (be it said to their praise that they never quarrelled) that had been spoken in the family for many a long day. Mary duly admired her

father's handsome new clothes. She kissed him sweetly as he was about to depart. "Father, dear," she whispered softly, but both her mother and Mr. Simeon heard her, "promise me to tell poor dear Mabel not to put her trust in the earthly mammon, but only in the heavenly manna."

Mr. Smith promised with a face of becoming solemnity. Mrs. Smith said good-bye at the hall-door, she had never seen her husband look so bright and comely; he seemed to bear the burden of his earthly pilgrimage with an unwonted elasticity of step. Mr. Simeon was his travelling companion; by Mary's express desire Mr. Simeon was to perform the funeral service. Mr. Simeon was nothing loth; all expenses would, of course, be paid; a day or two in London at free quarters—nothing could be more *à propos* or pleasant. Indeed, as regarded the feelings of both travellers, the sting of death had been entirely removed.

It was a most delightful journey. Mr. Simeon was entrusted with the purse, and

Mr. Smith had only to loll at ease on the soft cushions of the carriage, and be thankful to Providence for so many blessings mercifully vouchsafed. The small corruptions of sixpence and a shilling had altered the whole tenor of life—they touched their hats to him, did guard and porter, and bustled about to fulfil his behests; Mr. Simeon, too, showed him an unusual amount of kind attention and consideration. It was indeed almost too much for the Christian humility of his heart to endure, and from time to time, as he looked back on the arid pilgrimage of past years, he could not resist shedding tears of thankfulness. Mr. Simeon very naturally attributed these tears to a wrong source, and he very graciously poured in the balm of an ineffective consolation—prescribing Christian resignation for joy of soul.

But, after all, the day of the funeral was the great day of Mr. Smith's life. He got through it with some difficulty; he was wonderfully and mercifully supported, or

else he must have broken down ; speaking carnally, he certainly would have broken down if the undertaker had not behaved like a son to him—so considerate, so specially deferential ; indeed, everybody was the same ; Jacob's old servant was attention itself ; the man felt that his late master's death had once more placed him on his probation, and he was most anxious to obtain a good word from Mr. Smith on his behalf. Then, too, the relations who had been asked to the funeral (Jacob had left particular directions, written in moments of irritation against his sister, Mrs. Corley, that her husband should not be asked to attend) were exceedingly civil and deferential to the father of the possessor of the property, concealing their bitterness by politic behaviour.

Again, the funeral was in itself eminently satisfactory, thoroughly handsome, thoroughly well equipped at all points ; indeed, it seemed almost worth dying, to be buried in such a truly effective style,

and Mr. Smith, on his daughter's behalf, was chief mourner, and held the first place in the elaborate ceremony. The undertaker was a man of great discernment, and had understood the situation at a glance.

“Of course the widow would wish every respect to be shown to the late Mr. Vaughan?”

“Of course,” was the reply of Mr. Barton, who was anxious very kindly to save Mrs. Vaughan all the trouble he could.

That assent was *carte blanche* to the undertaker for a substantial display of funereal grief. Restrictive stint would have been an outrage on the sanctity of human feelings. There was no stint, therefore; everything was good and genuine (as far as things are good and genuine in these days), and in great plenty. Crape scarves, rich Lyons silk scarves, the very best goods in the market, and cut to full lengths. Above all, and this was a most important point, a point upon which Mary Smith had been most emphatic in her letters, it was

a thoroughly Protestant funeral. Not a single trace of popery could be discovered by the most evangelical eyes—not the slightest taint of ritualism. Still, there must be some ornamentation nowadays, and no exception could be taken to metal serpents, nicely burnished, and upturned torches, but beyond this permitted licence of decoration, absolutely nothing of an unscriptural nature could be detected. Workmen are so careless, however, and they make all these metal emblems, or ornaments, as you may choose to call them, at Birmingham by the gross, and just because a cross came to hand, the workman thoughtlessly nailed it on, but the mistake was fortunately detected at the last moment, and a serpent used in substitution.

Viewed as a whole, in the light of a work of art, the effect of the funeral was perhaps somewhat monotonous—possibly this result is unavoidable in elaborate funerals, because the multiplication of mutes, and staves, and plumes, and vulgar faces of perfunc-

tory solemnity must tend to monotony—but still it was an impressive and solemn monotony. The display of feathers was very remarkable. Wherever feathers could be introduced, there were feathers, nodding on horses, hearse, coaches—nodding on a large tray, borne by a portly man of tried solemnity in the front of the procession, whose face was invaluable for striking the keynote of solemn grief—a drum-major in the march of death. Why that affluence of feathers? and what the moral and æsthetic effect of feathers upon the soul of man?—who shall attempt an explanation? Whether as evidences of an outpouring of grief, and if so, how? Whether as emblems of something or the other, say, of the vanity of human aspirations—whether typical of the soul or the body, or not typical at all—but in any event, even if irrelevancy be finally admitted, those feathers were deeply impressive, for the mystery of the irrelevant is perpetually interesting to the souls of men. May we, therefore,

all die to be buried like Jacob Vaughan, in the odour of affluent respectability. Alas ! many a poor soul which has put its earthly trust in foreign bonds, infidel and otherwise, cannot at this period of depression, place its trust in that hope. May we, therefore, all live until better times have restored the old balance to the banker's account.

Mr. Smith returned home to his daughter's house, thoroughly satisfied with all that had occurred, and in a state of cheerful, though of course chastened spirits. It must be remembered that the great satisfaction of the day dwelt in its complete sanctification ; if it had been a question of a dinner party—a ball would be of course out of the question—or even an ordinary tea party, without supper, with merely cake and a glass or so of sherry as a finale, a sense of sin through worldliness would have been created ; but the solemnity of a funeral did away with all taint of evil, and left the soul free for the temperate enjoyment of creature blessings. Mr. Smith presided

at a most handsome luncheon after the funeral; everything of course was cold, but thoroughly good and substantial, with excellent flavour, and duly set out with all possible appliances of costly plate; one raised pie in particular was productive of much inward satisfaction, and a rich and well-matured golden sherry, from Jacob Vaughan's favourite bin, blended most admirably, in Mr. Smith's mind (and Mr. Smith was a very temperate drinker), with the solemnity of the occasion, lending a sanctified halo to the pleasant sense of money value which pervaded the various articles of furniture (of the best workmanship), and this grateful halo finally deepened into a sort of rich chiaroscuro of thankfulness for all temporal blessings. Indeed, never before in all his spiritual experiences had Mr. Smith attained such an absolute condition of supreme resignation to the will of Heaven.

Mr. Simeon was deeply affected by this touching evidence of his aged friend's

spiritual strength. He had witnessed his tears in the railway carriage, and he now beheld his happy triumph over earthly afflictions and sorrow through a truly sanctified resignation. "Sorrowing not as without hope," he said, with due solemnity of voice, and he took just one last glass, the fourth, be it said, of that excellent sherry. "Not sorrowing as worldlings sorrow, whose hearts are filled with earthly things—would that your poor afflicted child could be brought to that happy state of chastened resignation which you are so mercifully permitted to enjoy."

"Amen," answered Mr. Smith, with tears in his eyes, and he helped himself to one last half-glass as Mr. Simeon passed the decanter. It was, indeed, the happiest day of Mr. Smith's life, and he always remembered it with sincere gratitude and an unfeigned sense of spiritual unworthiness; it was, indeed, the only one opportunity of earthly distinction which Providence had meted to him in the course of his long life,

and he had the satisfaction of feeling that he had acquitted himself on the whole in a very satisfactory manner.

Mr. Simeon would gladly have afforded spiritual consolation to Mrs. Vaughan, but her sorrow, and her remorse, and her great and constant love, even if he had been aware of the true state of her feelings, would have been mysterious beyond his comprehension. His efforts were therefore fruitless.

Her father's love, on the other hand, if it failed to heal her wounds, at least soothed her by its sympathy. His knowledge of her nature was quite as limited as Mr. Simeon's, but the true love of his heart touched her, as the inarticulate but inexhaustible love of a dumb animal, touches the heart of man by its sheer affluence of affection.

Miss Lindsay did not entirely understand Mabel; she naturally thought, as soon as propriety permitted, that Mabel would desire to see Frank Foster, and that long before propriety did permit, she would yearn for the coming of the permitted day.

But the very thought of Frank Foster was abhorrent to Mabel's soul—it was mingled with a sense of remorse and a sense of ingratitude; but for his existence she might have really loved the man who had dealt so handsomely by her; but for his existence she would now be free from that torturing feeling of remorse, and that anguish of ingratitude; but yet her own heart deceived her, for she really loved Frank Foster with all the strength of her strong love; she thought, indeed, very much about him, although the thought was mingled with repulsion; she thought, in any event, that he must scorn her for her marriage; she had been faithless, palliate it as she might, and his faith in her could nevermore be rekindled.

“I shall never marry him,” she said abruptly to Miss Lindsay. (Miss Lindsay had just assured her of Frank Foster's slow but favourable progress.)

“Not just now, of course; not directly,” answered Miss Lindsay.

"Never, never!" was the emphatic rejoinder.

Miss Lindsay replied with a smile of incredulity.

"I say, never, never," reiterated Mabel, nettled by Miss Lindsay's doubt. "Besides, how could I, if I would? Do you think a man like Frank Foster would stoop to ask me now? Do you think I should stoop to ask a man to marry me?"

"I don't know how, but at the proper time I do know you will, and I do know you ought," rejoined Miss Lindsay, with decision. "I tell you he loves you. I make no mistake as to that."

"Let us cease this useless talk!" exclaimed Mabel, her heart beating violently. "By the way," she asked, "has he received that arrear of salary?"

"He hasn't," answered Miss Lindsay, "the firm is in difficulties."

"But he must be in want of money," urged Mabel.

"He doesn't want money just now,"

replied Miss Lindsay ; “ he’s far too ill to spend money : besides, he’s my guest, my invalid——”

“ You darling woman,” cried Mabel, in a burst of gratitude—and she threw her arms round Miss Lindsay and kissed her ; “ you dear creature, but you can’t afford all this expense ; you ought not to afford it, all that expensive time at Southampton, all this time now.”

“ I can afford it,” answered Miss Lindsay, bluntly.

“ But you mustn’t, you mustn’t ! you have fifty other calls for your money. I am so rich, money is nothing to me now. I must pay for everything ; he will want a change of air when he gets better. I can never marry him—but—what’s the use of money if I can’t spend it as I like ? I am going to give away a great deal to Mr. Vaughan’s family : it’s my duty to do so. I don’t care for money, you know that, but he must have all he wants—he must, he shall.”

“No, Mabel,” answered Miss Lindsay, with decision. “I love that young man; he’s got the true metal in him. I say he mustn’t, and I say he shan’t, touch one penny of Mrs. Vaughan’s money while I’ve got a penny to help him with.”

CHAPTER IX.

MR. SIMEON COUNTS THE COST OF
CANONIZATION.

THE concurrence of Mr. Simeon and Mrs. Smith, together with the acquiescence of Mary herself was not sufficient to ensure the saintship of Mary Smith. The question was ultimately decided in a little room in the neighbourhood of Paternoster Row. There is a human process in all things. The production of a Protestant saint is a question of pecuniary profit—will it pay? is the query for solution. The publisher, or more strictly the publisher's reader, dealt with that essential question in the aforesaid little room. After all, it does not so much

matter how things are done, provided that they be done in the end. A Roman saintship may be advocated before a council of cardinals, and the affirmance may represent a question of church policy ; to wit, a dream of French bayonets and the wild hope of a reaction, might one day make a saint of Joan of Arc, and so, somehow or other, you acquire your saint. Our methods are different from the Italian ; the assent of a publisher, and not a conclave, is the method by which a Protestant saint is furnished to the religious world, or rather a section thereof, in England. In this land, canonization is a printed book ; and a printed book, be it remembered, represents the cost of writing, of editing, of printing, of binding—sometimes in fancy boards with emblematic devices stamped in gold ; to this may be added the necessity of a frontispiece, usually an old man with a prominent Bible, a sunset, and an invalid girl in a high-backed invalid chair, together with a vignette on the opposite page—say, a grave,

with headstone backed by another setting sun ; but all these things cost money—a contingency of profit and a contingency of loss.

It is said that tea tasting is a valuable and special gift ; that a marvellously delicate and appreciative touch is necessary in estimating the value of raw silk ; that some few noses of exquisite organization can detect the particular sherry of a given shipper without the assistance of the palate ; that some connoisseurs of china can tell the difference between Bristol paste and Dresden—both hard pastes, be it remembered—by handling specimens behind their backs ; but, after all, the man who could tell to the nicety of a pecuniary estimate, the receptivity of the public for a work of literature or for a play, would represent a greater wonder—nay, alas, an impossibility—an ideal at best only capable of approximate realization ; given a clever mind, capable of estimating the value of a clever work and the area of clever persons to

which it would be applicable, could that same mind be capable of gauging the merit of a work of inanity and its value in the area of the inane? And yet inanity requires its literature and its plays, and pays handsomely for both; but for the purpose of a thoroughly critical appreciation, we require a clever mind, and yet, with all its cleverness, it must be distinctly capable of suffering fools gladly; a mind not warped, or irritated, or outbalanced by inanity, but capable of calmly estimating inanity to the market value of a fraction. How inestimably valuable to publisher and manager would be the existence of such a mind. The value of the inane is constantly overlooked, and much good money is thereby lost. We crane after the birds, and we walk over the hares crouching in the swedes at our feet.

Before seriously devoting himself to the biography of Mary Smith, Mr. Simeon, with very commendable prudence, during his visit to London (and a decidedly judicious

tone of mind was visible as well in his theology as in the general tenor of his life), consulted a gentleman connected with the world of religious literature with whom he had had some small literary dealings. Mr. Enos Hard, the gentleman in question, was a man of profound scientific acquirement, and great scientific enthusiasm, his faith decidedly tending towards a materialistic *cultus*. His well-known scientific reputation had frequently caused him to be consulted by publishers of scientific works. The advice he gave was invariably wrong, his enthusiasm entirely warped his judgment and misled his conclusions. On the other hand, with regard to the value of religious publications his advice was unrivalled—his feelings in this respect never blinded his eyes to facts or perverted his deductions. He roughly knew to within a few pounds the market value to be derived from each section, and almost each sub-section, of the religious world, and he was thoroughly acquainted with the exact amount of litera-

ture which each division was capable of absorbing in the course of a year; and he knew, moreover—and this was a most necessary item of knowledge—the exact publishing price adapted to each section. Thus, there was a high-church price, and a low-church price, and a dissenting price; the error of even a shilling either way being capable of destroying, or largely damaging, the value of a book in other respects thoroughly applicable to a given class of readers. The pursuits of our lives and the pleasures of our lives are oftentimes at strange issue; the business of Mr. Hard's life was the perusal of religious manuscripts, the enthusiasm of his leisure moments was the ultimate evolution of mind out of matter.

The great triumph of Mr. Hard's literary career was the success of the "Brazen Vessel." This publication had been the ruin of at least two religious enthusiasts; the third proprietor had in desperation invoked the aid of Mr. Hard as editor. It

was a most fortunate selection ; after a few months of judicious management, the circulation increased to a surprising extent, and a thoroughly satisfactory pecuniary result was attained. But alas, this triumph of Mr. Hard's intellectual power was chequered by the failure of his work of love—a small weekly physiological *brochure* entitled, “Matter, a Journal of Mental Progress and Psychological Research.”

Mr. Hard derived a considerable honorarium from the “Brazen Vessel,” but in his wild enthusiasm he flung away every penny upon his unfortunate bantling. It was all in vain ; thanks to his unrivalled knowledge of the religious world, the “Brazen Vessel” prospered to his inward mortification, and, notwithstanding his great scientific acquirements, “Matter” limped languidly along, to his intense sorrow. Mr. Hard's intellectual workshop was the small room aforesaid in Paternoster Row. He possessed a thoroughly useful and most comprehensive theological library, together with all the

newest works on science. He read his manuscripts at a sort of table-desk, backed by two or three deal shelves full of test tubes and spirit lamps—it was at best a rough-and-ready sort of sanctum, for Mr. Hard did not value the sentiment of fine furniture, and his friendship for dust and litter almost verged on the tenderness of love.

The sanctum had its special odour too, because the process of evolving mind from matter in the test tubes, was attended with a certain slight smell, and this odour was combined with whiffs of sulphuric acid and methylated spirits, because some of the test tubes required to be boiled, some treated with acids, and some indeed iced. Oftentimes, in the midst of perusing a fiery treatise in defence of the Mosaic Cosmogony for the use of this or that section of the religious world, did he raise his anxious eyes to those test tubes, if haply the origin of life might be visible in the residuum of his combinations of nerve fibre, and tissue, with heat, acid, and cold.

Although Mr. Hard believed very little in the various theological works which he perused, yet he was the instrument providentially selected to enlarge the restricted limits of Mr. Simeon's Christian love. Mr. Simeon attended Mr. Hard by appointment. Mr. Hard was a rigid economist of time, and talked with great terseness.

"I've got some work for you," said Mr. Hard, breaking violently into the midst of one of Mr. Simeon's round sentences, "a ritualistic story—I want you to edit it for Broadband's house."

"But Mr. Broadband is a low-church publisher," exclaimed Mr. Simeon with surprise.

"Of course, of course," interrupted Mr. Hard impatiently.

"And my own principles are soundly evangelical," objected Mr. Simeon.

"That's why I want you to edit it—it's a capital story. 'Surplices' would have accepted it at once, only they are full for this season with high-church stories.

Broadband isn't, and he want's something good—he pays well for what he wants.”

“But how can I edit a high-church story—consider my conscience,” responded Mr. Simeon with regret, for Mr. Broadband's liberality was well known in the world of religious literature.

“Bless the man,” cried Mr. Hard pettishly. “It's boiled over,” he exclaimed ruefully—and at the same moment he blew out a spirit lamp.

“What has boiled over?” inquired Mr. Simeon sympathetically.

Mr. Hard did not vouchsafe any reply, but he shook his head sadly, for the fifty-first time the mental principle had eluded him by boiling itself away. With an exclamation of vexation, Mr. Hard turned from the test tubes. “Don't you understand, I want you to alter that ritualistic story into a low-church tale?”

“How can I do that?” asked Mr. Simeon in blank astonishment; “what, turn a story inside out?”

“Not a bit inside out,” retorted Mr. Hard with impatience; “leave the story just as it is—read through the manuscript carefully, and wherever you read ‘works’ write in ‘faith’—substitute frames of mind for crosses—alter the quoted texts—action to resignation, objective to subjective—and the thing’s done. Ah, by the way, you must write a preface, showing that the narrative illustrates in a very remarkable manner the fruits of a sound protestant and scriptural faith.”

“If that’s all,” said Mr. Simeon with alacrity, “I shall be very happy to undertake the good work.”

“All right,” responded Mr. Hard, and he turned intently to the test tubes.

“I was anxious to inquire,” said Mr. Simeon, “whether there is any room just now for a religious biography?”

“A drop or two of nitric acid,” murmured Mr. Hard, absorbed by pending experiment.

“I was venturing to inquire as to religious

biography," repeated Mr. Simeon with some embarrassment.

"I beg your pardon," answered Mr. Hard, "just one moment. Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't speak!" he exclaimed anxiously.

Some invocation or the other is almost a necessity to mankind. Mr. Hard still retained his use of the old forms of invocation—in a measure, of course, out of deference to the profession of his visitor, but mainly because he had not yet succeeded in framing a satisfactory and terse form of invocation, out of the potentiality of an aggregate of globules.

Mr. Hard seized the bottle of acid—two drops at the utmost—his hand quivered with excitement—alas, three drops fell, and the mental principle, instead of being duly developed, was destroyed by the excess of acid. It must be in truth confessed that Mr. Hard was a very indifferent experimentalist—his nervous anxiety to verify a foregone conclusion constantly interfered with the success of his investigations. He

shrugged his shoulders with impatience—he would have sworn, but he did not, partly on account of his visitor, and partly on account of the impersonality of globules. “What were you saying?” he inquired brusquely of Mr. Simeon.

“As to a market for a religious biography,” and Mr. Simeon proceeded to open the subject in his somewhat inflated style.

After a few moments of impatient listening, Mr. Hard again burst into the centre of the subject. “A small fortune if you hit the right nail! Low church section, good! Only give us a new ‘Dairyman’s Daughter’—money to a dead certainty—make it middle-class piety, if possible; that’s your market, remember; and buyers like a reproduction of their own experiences. Simple language of course, the simpler the better—as many texts as possible, crammed in anywhere—stick to inactive resignation—active piety is always troublesome in small households—it upsets the meals and worries the cook and housemaid—hits here and

there at Rome and the ritualists, it gives a piquant relief. Small octavo, three-and-sixpence, green cloth, nicely lettered— young girl of course, must die young— consumption if possible. Torquay a very good locality—or Bournemouth would do— must be published as a Christmas book— religious world always buys at that period out of protest against secular literature at the bookstalls in blazing colours. Good-bye—knock off that story and preface—sharp, mind.”

Mr. Simeon retired thoroughly satisfied, with the MS. in his pocket, and Mr. Hard turned to his test tubes; but the saintship of Mary Smith was secured, albeit in a sort of hurried parenthesis, but somehow matters of the gravest import are often turned out topsyturvy in the turmoil of life.

Mr. Simeon performed his editorial task admirably. By the skilful omission and addition of a very few words, the religious tone of the story was entirely transformed. Mr. Broadband was delighted, so also were

many readers belonging to the lower section of the church, and a certain section of dissenters. The story indeed proved a great success, and the religious periodicals attached to those sections affirmed, that the narrative afforded a remarkable illustration of the value of a thoroughly sound evangelical faith.

Mr. Simeon received his cheque gladly, and his editorial work opened to his mind a slight suspicion that moral excellence *might* be the outcrop of other forms of faith than his own. He made no open affirmation on the subject—he could not indeed, with prudence, afford to do so, having regard to the pew-rents of his chapel and the size of his family—but still it was a certain spiritual advantage for him to suspect that perhaps (only perhaps) Christianity might be a larger thing than the rigid faith of a limited body of English religionists.

CHAPTER X.

SHALL FOSTER RETURN TO TIFLIS ?

A DAY or two after Jacob Vaughan's funeral, Mabel accompanied her father and Mr. Simeon to Torquay. Mr. Smith, it may be mentioned, was not quite so cheerful on the return journey as he had been on his journey to London : possibly a sense of the coming abridgment of his brief social prominence cast a shadow on his spirits, but nothing could exceed his tenderness and devotion to his daughter. Mr. Simeon, too, was most attentive. Mabel was indeed a most attractive person in his eyes ; her conversion would be a great spiritual feather in his reputation ; and good sound white paint, three coats flatted, bestowed upon his chapel

of ease, would constitute a very reasonable thank-offering for regeneration: the first fruits, but not the last, of a new spirit.

Mary's solicitude on behalf of her sister was very sincere and heartfelt. Mary viewed the matter in her thoroughly sensible manner, combined, of course, with strong evangelical feeling. Poor Mabel had indeed suffered a very great and irreparable loss, but that sorrow, regarded in a religious spirit, would speedily be converted into a chastening blessing. Mary's chief anxiety, therefore, was with regard to the great burden of wealth which Mr. Vaughan's will had cast upon her sister. Hitherto the temporal afflictions of Mr. Vaughan had prevented Mabel from becoming a mere worldling, but the removal of Mr. Vaughan to a better country (so at least she humbly trusted) would open to worldliness a free access to Mabel's soul. Mary felt that it would be her bounden duty to combat this temptation to the best of her ability.

So Mary held her medicine in readiness

for the treatment of her sister's presumed weakness; strong tonics, wholesome but bitter to the taste. Alas! we are blind doctors of the soul. Mabel needed no such medicine.

"You need not fear my growing worldly," Mabel protested one day in some weariness at her sister's discourse, but still in a thoroughly kind tone.

"We must remember, darling," answered Mary earnestly, "we are all poor, weak children of sin—and riches are a great temptation."

"Yea, eating up the very marrow of the soul," observed Mr. Simeon, who happened to be present.

"I think I can convince you that you need not be anxious for me on that score," continued Mabel. "I will talk to you in confidence. Mr. Barton tells me roughly, as far as he is at present able to estimate the value of the property, that I shall possess about ninety thousand pounds under Mr. Vaughan's will."

“The Lord has indeed dealt very mercifully—blessings heaped up, and overflowing!” exclaimed Mr. Simeon, astonished at the magnitude of the estimated sum. “Oh, my dear lady, let me pray you to spare a small portion of this great gift, say a tithe, a tenth of what you possess, for the Lord’s vineyard.”

“I am going to give away much more than that,” answered Mabel quietly; “I am going to act upon the assumption that Mr. Vaughan died intestate. I am going to take for myself what the law would award to me under such circumstances.”

“The strength of sin is the law,” involuntarily ejaculated Mr. Simeon, with a certain feeling of dismay.

“Namely, one-third of the gross sum,” continued Mabel; “the remainder I shall divide as I choose between the next of kin.”

Both Mary and Mr. Simeon started with astonishment.

“But are you sure that this is quite right?” asked Mary with much concern.

"Quite right; so my conscience tells me," answered Mabel.

"We should all pray earnestly to be directed in such matters," continued Mary. "I do not understand carnal business, but I am sure in all things we ought to do nothing rashly, but everything to the glory of the Lord."

"Amen!" responded Mr. Simeon in solemn tones.

"Mr. Barton says I am quite right," rejoined Mabel.

"But Mr. Barton is only a carnal adviser," objected Mary; "I am sure, darling Mabel, you require in this serious affair spiritual advice and counsel. The gifts of the Lord are very gracious—yea, like precious dew on Hermon, and they ought not to be lightly squandered away."

"Amen!" again responded Mr. Simeon, with decided approbation.

"You must remember, dear Mabel," continued Mary, with increased earnestness, "that riches have probably been bestowed

upon you for some great object—that object, when discovered, will become a great duty—I ask very fervently that you may be mercifully saved from committing a very grievous error, by divesting yourself of the power of performing that great duty when the hour comes; we ought always, dear Mabel, to watch and pray.”

“It is our bounden duty to remember,” urged Mr. Simeon, assuming a decidedly pastoral tone, “that when the hour came the foolish virgins had no oil in their lamps. Now what is scripturally termed ‘oil’ may be held to signify, as a figure, the earthly medium by which we perform spiritual good. It may indeed be right at certain periods to give away this precious oil, especially unto those who are of the household of faith—but we should prayerfully seek for the right time to perform this important act, and instead of consulting worldlings, we should rather consult those who are indeed foolish as babes and sucklings in the knowledge of this world, but are wise in grace and truth.”

“Yes,” added Mary, “we must endeavour to bridle the carnal impulses of the heart by a truly humble and religious spirit, and a sober, devout, and prayerful judgment.”

The subject dropped, but neither Mary nor Mr. Simeon again referred to the sin of worldliness in their spiritual conversations with Mabel.

In the midst of love and solicitude, Mabel pined sadly for consolation and sympathy. One day a letter from Miss Lindsay informed her that Frank Foster intended to return to Tiflis; his employers, owing to their difficulties, were very urgent that he should do so; there were business affairs to be wound up and settled, in the conduct of which his presence on the spot was almost essential. Mabel wrote an anxious letter to Miss Lindsay inquiring her opinion of Foster's health, whether he was well enough to undertake such a journey—whether his constitution would be able to withstand the insidious effects of the

climate? Miss Lindsay's reply brought scant comfort: the voyage itself would probably act as a restorative, but, for her own part, she considered Foster to be in a most unfit state to encounter the inevitable roughness of semi-civilized living, not to mention the many dangers of fever, ague, etc.; but he will go, added Miss Lindsay, and I can't stop him.

Jacob Vaughan had only been dead two months.

Mabel in her despair wrote a letter to Frank Foster. It was a very difficult letter to write, because Mabel knew full well her lover's proud and sensitive nature, and many a time did she throw down her pen in despair and tear up the sheet of paper. It was so strange and bewildering to have money at her command and not to be able to use it; to use it for the one precious object of her life—the very salvation of the man she loved.

At first, every draft she commenced twisted itself into an eventual offer of her

hand as the only possible apology for the present offer of pecuniary assistance. All her expressions of concern in his health and well-being led her finally into that dilemma—in his very love and pity for her, he was to forego his dignity and self-respect. At last she wrote a letter which at one moment satisfied her with its coldness, and the next moment dissatisfied her by its want of fervour:—

“DEAR MR. FOSTER,

“I learn from Miss Lindsay that you are about to return to the locality which has so seriously affected your health. I believe I understand your motive for this step;—a very proper desire to resume your professional labours. Miss Lindsay mentions in a letter to me that she does not think you are well enough to return, at least at present. I hope you will make use of me as an old friend to advance you any sum that may be necessary (a loan, understand, which you can repay at your con-

venience) to enable you to take advantage of sea air, or a foreign tour—I am sure the Righi Culm would be a most invigorating place—or perhaps German baths, or wherever the doctors may recommend. No one will ever know that I have written this letter—it is a very small affair between old friends—and it is very hard if old friends may not help one another in this work-a-day world.

“ I am, dear Mr. Foster,

“ Ever very faithfully yours,

“ MABEL VAUGHAN.”

Frank Foster did not show Mabel's letter to Miss Lindsay, but he answered it by the evening's post. The answer cost him many a pang, for Mabel's letter had wounded him sorely—poverty once had kept them asunder, and now wealth stood between them. The rich woman offered him money; very politely, it was true, but politeness could not cancel the insult. Of course this view of the matter was thoroughly wrong-headed, and Miss Lindsay, if she had had

the opportunity, could, with her common sense, have put things straight by showing the difficulties of Mabel's position ; but love is so blind, and irritable and touchy, and sometimes so utterly devoid of faith in the object loved. There was nothing, however, on the surface of Foster's answer which betrayed the state of his feelings : on the contrary, it was written in a very cordial and courteous tone :—

“DEAR MRS. VAUGHAN,

“I am exceedingly obliged to you for your kind offer. I thoroughly appreciate the motive which has prompted it. I assure you in reply, that it is not necessary for me to avail myself of your kindness, because my health is almost restored—indeed I believe I only require the sea voyage to set me up completely—besides this, I am almost pledged by word of mouth, and certainly by professional reputation, to return for a time at least to my old post, where several important

matters are awaiting my personal superintendence.

“I am, dear Mrs. Vaughan,

“Very sincerely yours,

“FRANCIS FOSTER.”

So the affair was settled;—Frank Foster would go back to Tiflis and die—that was Mabel’s reading of the letter.

“Oh, Mary,” she cried in her despair to her sister, who was sitting in the open air, shaded by a thicket of arbutus from the bright sun, on the easy couch that Mr. Vaughan had purchased for her, “help me!” It was a lovely calm summer afternoon, not sultry, but tempered with a gentle breath of sea freshness, and land and sea were steeped in a delicate daffodil light. Mary’s thoughts were thoroughly in unison with the calm influences of the day; and in the gentle dreaminess of half-closed eyes, it seemed as if the rest which belongeth to the people of God had been verily dropped like a holy veil upon her soul: all sin was

cast away, and all care was lost in heavenly blessedness; into the midst of this state of beatitude was suddenly flung the discord of her sister's cry, "Help me!" The spell of blessed peace was rudely broken, and Mary aroused herself with pain to listen to her sister's prayer.

Mabel seated herself at Mary's side and rested her head on her shoulder. She spoke, or rather whispered, with all the abruptness of deep agitation:

"Frank Foster is going back to Tiflis."

"Very imprudent, I should say, considering what you have told me about his state of health," answered Mary quietly, and with some surprise at finding that Foster's movements were the cause of her sister's anxiety. Mabel had told Mary something, but not everything, about Foster's return to England, but as far as feelings went, she had spoken of him in a decided tone of merely friendly interest.

"He says he is pledged to go," continued Mabel.

“I don’t consider that any pledge warrants a man in risking his life,” observed Mary ; “indeed the history of Jephtha’s daughter pointedly reveals to us the sinfulness of inconsiderate and intemperate pledges.”

“You see he is wholly dependent on his profession,” urged Mabel.

“That, indeed, places the affair in a very unfortunate light,” responded Mary.

“I have done what I can to stop him,” continued Mabel, in a broken voice ; “I must tell you in strict confidence, that I offered him, as a loan, mind, any money that he might require to go where the doctors advised—as an old friend, I thought there could be no harm in that.”

“No harm, certainly,” replied Mary ; “a very natural and kind thing to do. Well, and hasn’t he accepted the offer ?”

“He declines it absolutely,” said Mabel, tearfully.

“Well, my dear Mabel,” answered Mary, in the same quiet tone, “what else can be

done? You have offered him the loan of money, and he very foolishly, or rather, erroneously, won't accept it. The error, I may almost call it sin, rests on his head.

"But I am sure this journey will be his death," urged Mabel.

"Alas, death is very often the penalty of sin, Mabel dear. I really don't think there is any more to be said on the subject." And Mary took up a book which lay near her. Its title was, "The Christian Soul's Victory ; or, This World Conquered."

Mabel watched her sister for a moment in despair, and then, with a convulsive cry, "I love him, Mary!" and clinging to her sister, she burst into a violent flood of tears.

Mary put down her book, and laid her hand affectionately and yet reprovngly on Mabel's head.

And now the natures of the two sisters stood face to face in all their antagonism—the asceticism of a dwarfed physical frame, and the impulses of a perfect physical

development; the first, free and unburdened through physical weakness, the last governed by the strength of conscience. They are not the same human natures, and therefore the same moral medicines and correctives are inapplicable. After the Renaissance had aroused the world from the worship of asceticism, and had turned it once more back to nature, the giant sculptor of the "new birth," who drew his inspiration from the *torso* of Hercules and the majesty of the antique fragments, felt that Christian conscience had for ever destroyed the pagan Venus, and he added the dominating element of conscience to that grand woman of his creation, who awakes to troubled thoughts from her painful sleeping in the chapel of the Medici—Venus no longer, but a perfect woman with a burdened soul. No longer the woman of ideal beauty only, beauty the end of all things, or the beautiful woman degraded by frivolity—those ideals of the pagan world—but woman with all her grandeur of form,

grand as the Venus of Milo, in the chamber of *death*, a watcher at the tomb.

"Mabel, dear, surely you forget yourself. Mr. Vaughan has only been dead about two months."

"I forget nothing, Mary," answered Mabel. "That's why I ask your help. Two months!" she added, in painful voice, "but I loved Frank Foster years ago."

"I thought that girlish love had passed and gone when the rash engagement was broken off."

"So did I, but it hadn't," rejoined Mabel.

"I must say, I look upon it in the light of a sin to talk of loving another man," said Mary; with decision; "at least at the present time."

"It makes me very miserable," pleaded Mabel but what can I do?"

"Conquer it!" answered Mary, with reproachful force. "Pluck out this error."

"Pluck out my heart!" exclaimed Mabel, passionately.

Mary looked up at her sister with wondering eyes.

“I tell you I love him heart and soul!” persisted Mabel.

Her sister's words sounded very wrong and sinful to Mary; but they appeared perhaps even more strange than wrong. In truth, however, love seemed to her a very small factor in the economy of life—a sort of collateral incident in the Christian pilgrimage, not a fundamental condition. And all those love stories with which the world was deluged,—they seemed not merely sinful and unprofitable by reason of their being novels, but at the same time purely foolish through the ridiculous and undue importance bestowed on human love.

“Mabel, dear, I am very pained to hear you talk in this exaggerated tone. The love of the creature makes us subject unto vanity. It is sinful to bestow an excess of love on the creature, which can only be offered without sin to the Author of all blessings and mercies.”

"It may be wrong—I don't know whether it is wrong—but I do love him," rejoined Mabel, with a flushed face.

"What would you do?" asked Mary, anxiously. "Enter into an engagement with Mr. Foster so soon after your husband's sudden death? Pray consider the terrible scandal, the manifest error of such a rash course."

"I know how wrong it is," pleaded Mabel. "Oh, Mary, I know how wrong," she repeated piteously, "how ungrateful it is. I declare to you, with the exception of writing that one letter, that I have never sent word or scrap to Frank Foster—never been near him—but if that journey be his death—Oh, Mary, when a few words from me"—and Mabel's voice faltered with emotion.

"Mabel, dear, however painful it may be, we must never palter with right or wrong; it is my duty to tell you as a loving sister that you are doing very wrong even to think of that young man; that you are committing a crime in the sight of Heaven

to allow such a violent and intemperate affection for any human being to dwell in your bosom. You must try to cast out these earthly thoughts; you must strive to think more about heavenly things. It is true that an earthly affection may be, under fitting and sober circumstances, a great blessing and support to some persons in their earthly pilgrimage; but it is not the chief affection which ought to govern man's heart. It can be conquered, believe me; it can be conquered by faithful and earnest prayer. I repeat, pray fervently for grace, and all those evil affections will fly from the heart. Remember, too, darling Mabel, that our adversary, the Devil, always urges us to a wicked and headstrong course by painting every object we sinfully desire, in a bright and alluring light, but directly we have sold ourselves to him, conscience makes those things dull and unprofitable, and even loathsome to our eyes."

Mabel made no rejoinder; she kissed her sister and appeared to acquiesce in the

monitions bestowed upon her. Mary felt thoroughly satisfied with the course she had pursued, and she experienced moreover a considerable sense of inward gratification at her success in dealing with her sister's infirmity. It is somewhat curious why Mabel should have quietly accepted from her sister, conclusions which in earlier days she had fiercely combated with Miss Lindsay; but Mary was her sister, and the habit of the family had ever been to concur in all that Mary advanced, primarily out of consideration for Mary's delicate health—and beyond this, Mabel's own conscience, moved by gratitude towards her late husband, was in a state of antagonism with her love; and still further, there was a terrible doubt whether Foster would ever really forgive her for her marriage. So Mabel strove to school her heart with her sister's monitions—actually strove by prayer to conquer her earthly affection. It was a strange delusion on her part, but it sufficed for the nonce, and at last she absolutely fancied that her

love had been conquered. Mary regarded her sister's spiritual progress with immense gratification, and a very pardonable amount of personal pride—there was now, indeed, every promise of Mabel's entire regeneration.

Alas, for Mary's hopes; the structure which Mabel had succeeded in raising between her heart and Frank Foster, was of the very flimsiest nature—when the strain came, it fell down like a pack of cards.

Mabel was compelled to go up to London for a few days on business connected with executorship matters. This journey, although unavoidable, was a subject of considerable regret to Mary, who knew that Frank Foster still remained with Miss Lindsay: but Mabel very readily promised her sister to avoid all contact with her *former* lover, and she specially used the word "former" in alluding to Foster.

In due course Miss Lindsay called to see Mabel—the change in Mabel's feelings with

regard to Foster, occasioned a certain lack of warmth, or rather constraint, between the two friends.

Miss Lindsay to Mabel's surprise, announced the immediate departure of Foster.

"It is very unnecessary for him to go," observed Mabel, in a tone of annoyance; "strictly between ourselves, I offered him, as a loan, all that would be needful for the perfect restoration of his health by travelling abroad or going where he chose."

"He never said a word to me on the subject," answered Miss Lindsay; "but that's his way, you know."

"At any rate, his going is no fault of mine," urged Mabel.

"He starts to-morrow morning early," said Miss Lindsay, briefly.

"From Southampton, of course?"

"No, Liverpool—a merchant steamer—it's cheaper."

"But not nearly so comfortable," exclaimed Mabel; "no surgeon on board."

"I fancy not," replied Miss Lindsay;

“and of course the accommodation is not so good; but we must cut our coats according to our cloth.”

Mabel made no reply, and after some further conversation relating to indifferent matters, Miss Lindsay returned home.

The structure in which Mary had so much confidence immediately broke down.

“If he must go, he must go,” murmured Mabel, “but he shall go by a proper ship—he must and *shall* do that.”

Frank Foster was busy packing his writing-case in Miss Lindsay’s parlour when his hostess returned.

“You musn’t run away any more, dear lady,” he said, looking up brightly. “You must give me all your company till I go away; I want to keep on telling you how kind and good you have been to me.”

“Then I shan’t stay,” said Miss Lindsay.

“But it does me real good to tell you,” continued Foster; “and besides, I want to tell you something else. You must know that Mrs. Vaughan very kindly, and in a

most delicate manner, offered me the pecuniary means of going abroad and getting quite well. Though I refused the offer, I thoroughly appreciated the kindness; when you see her again, tell her what I say."

Foster, as he spoke, had his back to the French windows, and Mabel, as she entered the room from the garden, heard the words he had spoken about her.

"Thank you, Mr. Foster," she stammered. He turned suddenly at her voice, and staggered back in surprise, catching at a chair for support.

"I know you are going to return to Tiflis," she said, speaking with nervous, rapid utterance; "I know it is necessary for you to go back, but I was determined not to give you the chance of writing to decline another offer from an old friend. I want you to return by one of the P. and O. boats as far as Malta or Constantinople, or at least as far as they go, not by one of those uncomfortable merchant steamers."

"It is very kind of you," he answered—

his voice trembled as he spoke—"but the truth is, my berth is already secured."

"Never mind that," she replied quickly. "Do gratify me by accepting this small request. Miss Lindsay," she cried, "do try to make this obstinate man——" She turned her head to invoke Miss Lindsay's assistance, but that lady had left the room. In terror at being left alone with her lover she lost her presence of mind—the room seemed to whirl before her eyes—she could only stammer some incoherent words.

But Foster, with perfect courtesy, relieved her from her painful embarrassment. "As you so kindly wish it," he said, "I shall be happy to be indebted to you for my passage by the P. and O. My things were going to be sent off this evening by the luggage-train, so there will be no difficulty in changing the route."

"Thank you," she said; but her eyes caught sight of the painful thinness of his hand, and raising her eyes for a moment's glance at his face, she saw the red scar on

his temple which still remained from that day of her agony, which she remembered so vividly.

“I don’t think the doctors ought to let you go,” she murmured. “I am sure you are not strong enough to rough it.”

“I must go,” he said decisively; “the voyage will be sure to set me up. Good-bye, Mrs. Vaughan,” and he grasped her hand with his—she *felt* the thinness of his hand.

“Again, good-bye,” she murmured; “it is very good of you to accept my small offer. I must go and find Miss Lindsay——” anything for an excuse, for she was fast breaking down.

Oh, good God! should she never see him again? He was going back in his weakness to peril and death; and she, with all her money, was powerless to save his life!

“Oh, Frank!” she cried, turning involuntarily on the threshold of the window entrance, “don’t go back to that fearful climate.”

Notwithstanding his physical weakness, he fought this battle of the heart better than she did; perhaps he was somewhat incensed against her, and pique gave him the force she lacked.

“I think, Mrs. Vaughan, we had better avoid all this. It is very painful to you—to us both, and it is quite needless; you have performed a very friendly act, and I have gratefully accepted it.” He spoke with great firmness, and perhaps his voice sounded somewhat harshly in her ears. She had all along feared his estrangement from her, and that fear drove her to desperation.

“Oh, Frank!” she cried passionately, “have some mercy on me; think of my position—a widow of little more than two months. Oh, that accursed marriage! why do I talk of it to you? Oh, that wicked act of faithlessness! for we were pledged, not by words, but by more than words—God’s will; and yet if you knew—if you only knew all—no, a little, even a very little. I

told your poor mother I married that man for money. It was a lie!—a lie to degrade myself in your eyes—to cure you of thinking any more of the woman you had lost. Oh, Frank, I love you so much!—alas, I never knew how much I loved you till that accursed marriage day—don't turn from me."

He had turned from her, because the mention of that day brought back the thought of his agony among the rocks, and he turned too in amazement at the fierce emotion depicted in her face and form.

"Have a little pity," she pleaded, in gasping words; "we women do suffer—they fling self-sacrifice upon us till it crushes the soul—I say, I suffered agonies piled up. My love for you—can you guess what it made me do? It made me almost a murderess. His life or mine, my love for you—suicide, I say—my hand on the door of that express train—death, or faithfulness to you—faithfulness, I solemnly swear, or I should have been crushed to death by those

swift wheels. My love for you—I never knew what a fearful thing it was, till I married that man.”

Well-nigh in exhaustion she sank down on her knees at his feet, but she still urged her vehement prayer for his love—she dared not pause for any word of his; in her terrible anxiety she felt her *amende* must be urged to the bitter end, for it needed but a word from him, a gesture even, to crush the one hope of her life.

“I fought it off, this love of mine, all the time of my married life—ever since his death—I should never have spoken now; but the thought of your peril has torn the words from my heart. I don’t care who rails at me, I only care for your life—let them rail——”

She saw how deeply he was moved, and she saw that his strength was little capable of supporting the emotion which wrung his heart.

“Selfish wretch that I am,” she cried reproachfully; “my words are too vehement,

I'll say nothing more—yes,” she added quickly, “one thing more—for Heaven's sake don't let any wretched feeling stand between us now, any petty thought of my wealth—don't let that be a curse upon us—sacrifice any false pride for the love of me—for the sake of all the agony I have suffered in my love for you.”

After a moment of terrible suspense, she felt that the victory was hers; the hand she clasped had given her the heart she sought, ere his emotion could frame responsive words.

“Mabel, dear Mabel,” he murmured; in the vehement conflict of his feelings he could say no more—he was utterly bewildered, moreover, by his dawning comprehension of the woman's nature who knelt at his feet—utterly dazed by that great wealth of love and devotion which she was offering to him with such humility; but those words of his were enough for her.

“Thank God!” she cried, with fervent thankfulness; and then she added in anxious

voice, "Not a word more, dearest ; I know all you feel—you are very weak still—mine now," and she clasped him in her arms—she was so strong, and the feverish ague still clung about him—she drew his head to her bosom, and she kissed his forehead. "Let us be silent and say nothing for a little time. Let us try to be calm—this joy is almost too fearful. Oh, Frank, thank God, the terrible barriers are flung down now." They sat awhile in silence—the silence of beating hearts. "Oh God," she presently cried, in the fulness of her heart, "you have rewarded us at last ; the world, and all its perplexities, and doubts, and sin, stood between us and our hearts, and now, oh merciful God, you have made us one, and cast away from us all perplexity, and doubt, and sin, for evermore."

Miss Lindsay did come back. "I give you two notice," she said, "once for all, that I am a dreadful dragon of propriety."

"You darling !" cried Mabel, and she started from the lover she had regained,

threw herself into the arms of the woman whose friendship had been, indeed, a great and precious friendship. "You have given him to me, safe and sound, through all the peril of a terrible illness: how can I ever bless you enough?"

"God's mercy," exclaimed Miss Lindsay.

"But your work," answered Mabel, with a fervent kiss; "your doing, that I am now what I am—your help through the hours of darkness and despair; I can never pay that great debt. Give us your blessing, true friend, it will do us good."

"I do bless you very heartily," said Miss Lindsay, with fervour, "and I pray God to have you in His merciful keeping." Miss Lindsay turned away from Mabel, and left the room—her heart also was very full. "Oh, Lord!" she cried, "those two souls that you gave into my charge, they are safe now from all temptation in the holy might of true and honourable love." And the prayer she uttered was a prayer of great rejoicing.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ENEMY BIDES HIS TIME.

MABEL had her own way in everything; Foster could refuse her nothing. She had loved so truly, and suffered and endured so much for his sake, that he felt she had a supreme right to regulate all matters relating to their engagement; although, indeed, the limitations which she cast upon it did seem at first sight somewhat hard. She peremptorily insisted that the fact of their engagement should not be made public for at least nine months from the date of the death of Mr. Vaughan; they were not to be married until the expiration of one year, and Mabel's first stipulation on this point

had been still more stringent. Additional hardness was given to these conditions, by Mabel's insistence that they were not to meet until the nine months had elapsed, and she was very reluctant even with regard to correspondence during this period.

"I do not wish to give any opportunity for people to tax me with an engagement which I shall be unable to deny, if I am forced to speak upon the subject." Mabel eventually yielded so far that a restricted correspondence might be carried on under cover to Miss Lindsay; nothing in truth was to bring them together except the serious illness of either.

"You are much better now, dearest," she said! "and you will go abroad to those German baths, and, I trust, soon get well and strong. I know the thought of making use of my money—that money which will be one day your own—rankles a little in your mind, but I am sure you will endure any little feeling of *mauvaise honte* for my sake. I shall be so happy when I think of you in

Germany. Only six more months, Frank, and then we shall be free to meet and talk as much as we choose—and then three more months!—you musn't go to Switzerland, remember, till we are married. Switzerland is the old dream! Oh, Frank, darling Frank! can God really mean us to be as happy as that—you and I, and all those glorious mountains—you and I together, and those glorious works of God? It will be just the time of year for a Swiss tour; it would be no use your going to Switzerland now—would it, poor weak darling?—till you are strong and well enough to enjoy those magnificent walks. But you will be your old self, I think, when you have been to Germany; and Miss Lindsay says she shall be able to go with you, at least for a time, as she wants to see some of those Moravian establishments, so everything suits admirably.”

It would have been ungrateful to say so in words, but Frank Foster could not quite help showing that there was a certain

travelling companion he would have preferred even to Miss Lindsay.

“Of course, dearest, I wish I could go with you—and yet, at the same time, I don’t—I can’t expect you to understand exactly what I feel. Oh, Frank, the very intensity of my joy at being engaged to you, the feeling that I am really loved and understood by you, it is almost like a pain to my heart. The feeling comes like the anguish of food to a famished body. Yes, darling, I have suffered so much, my heart has been so tortured and torn, that I can scarcely endure such an excess of joy. I shall be all the better for being quietly at Torquay with my own people. I shall get back to my old self once more. I have travelled very far away from my own nature; I have been wicked and rebellious, like the children of Israel, and I have said and thought hard and bitter things! I have almost in my despair turned away from Heaven. When we meet again I shall be, by His blessing, the Mabel of old days, and

the cruel wounds which have scarcely ceased bleeding will be quite healed—and love will then be only joy and happiness.”

“Besides all this thought of myself,” she added after a pause, “we ought at least in gratitude, as God has given us all this happiness, to think of what is right and proper in His sight and in the sight of men. You must remember that I am still the Puritan girl you used to love and sometimes teaze for her narrow old-fashioned notions ; but somehow those old religious feelings of my childhood have come back in this blessed hour stronger than ever to my heart. You must remember,” she continued, “that I have a mass of duties to perform before I shall be quite free from the obligations of my former state. I dare say Miss Lindsay may have told you something about my views of justice and honour with regard to the large property bequeathed to me. Oh, Frank, Mr. Vaughan honoured me greatly by bequeathing to me this great trust, and I must always feel deeply grate-

ful to him for this testimony of his confidence in my integrity. I love you so much that when I stand by your side at the altar, I will not have on my conscience one thought of a duty or obligation left unfulfilled, to destroy the happiness of that joyful day."

He listened to all she said with a beating heart: she was his at last; and he was the idol of her noble nature. He was almost overcome by shame when he thought of all her nobleness, and yet no harsh, pedantic affectation of duty or religion marred her sweetness; all was so womanly and loving, so enthralling in the soft graces of womanhood, and yet withal so grand and noble.

"I don't deserve this great love, Mabel." He spoke with quivering lip. "I have been very peevish and distrustful; I hope illness is my excuse. I have never looked at things as I ought to have looked at them; I have kept dwelling upon myself and my own narrow thoughts of happiness; forgetful that there were great duties for

you to fulfil, and which must for awhile part us asunder. You are braver, and truer, and nobler than I am, Mabel."

"Don't talk nonsense, sir," she exclaimed, with a bright smile breaking through her tears; and then with sudden emphasis, "Not truer, Frank. I'm not truer than you are: that awful day you passed among the rocks! Miss Lindsay told me all about it. I too suffered on that day," she cried, with a shudder which convulsed her whole frame: "Oh, my God! spare me from agony like that." She sank down at his side overcome by her emotion.

He would have kissed her, but she drew back from him.

"Not now, dearest," she murmured; "not till I have got quite rid of those horrible thoughts. You see," she added after a lengthened pause, "that it's all for the best we should be separated for a while. I said the wounds are not healed yet, and I should only torture you as well as myself. I know I shall soon recover my

old nature: 'He loves me,' I shall say; I shall mix up that joyful thought with everything. Oh, darling," she exclaimed fervently, "when I utter those words, it works like magic, why, even now—oh, you cannot tell what blessed work those words are doing! they are crowding out the old hard revengeful feelings from my heart. I meant to be rigidly just towards his family—every jot and tittle of their just rights; but I meant to do it out of scorn and hatred; I meant to fling the money at Mrs. Corley with bitter words, but I shan't do that now—I can't do that now; I'm too happy, I'm too grateful for all God's mercy to hate any more; I haven't got room for hatred in my heart. Kiss me, Frank; you can kiss me now."

"Farewell, darling," she said with fervour. "May God protect you for my sake; may you soon get well and strong. Enjoy yourself in Germany, mind—a regular holiday. I need not tell you to take care of him, Miss Lindsay; you are always doing that,

you dear good soul. For only six months, Frank," she added in a low tone, and she kissed his forehead.

"Oh, Mabel, dearest," he murmured, "my lips," and he held her hands in his. She looked at him, gazing into his eyes with a strange intermingling of happiness and sadness, and her eyes presently filled with tears.

"No, no," she answered gently, "in six months, dearest—a little patience—when I am once more the old Mabel. I can only thank God, Frank, that I have been permitted at this time to give you even that kiss. Farewell, darling," and with a sudden effort she left him and left the house.

She lingered a short time in the garden.

"Oh God," she cried, in the fulness of her heart, "don't make me too happy; this joy is terrible. It would kill me if I lost him now; if it be your good purpose, let us both die, but not separation here on earth."

Going up to her room, she passed the

door of *their* room, and suddenly the fierce words of his relentless doom burst forth in great red letters in her memory. Well, that cruel decree was already set aside—without let or hindrance, she would, by God's mercy, marry in due time the man she loved—but she could not bear to assert her triumph over the dead man's will; nay, she still quailed before the old curse, and she shuddered now as she had shuddered when it was first pronounced. She passed on to the room in which she had always slept, which had been the dressing-room of their bedroom. A feeling of reproach clouded her mind—*he* had left her the wealth which was to be the foundation of her new happiness, and yet in the short space of three months she was actually engaged to be married, in defiance of his emphatic objections. “I'm glad I'm not to see Frank for six whole months,” she murmured, and that recollection was a sort of salve to her conscience. But her feelings did not realize her hopes: she had

thought that she could be very happy alone in her own room: she had believed and hoped that with that feeling of love in her heart, the old prayers and the old spiritual communings with God would return to her with all their old happiness and consolation; she wanted to tell the whole story of her love to God, and, as it were, to receive in return the calming approval of Heaven. She would be better able to endure her happiness through that support. But, alas, to her dismay, when she sought to pray she could not find words; she tried in vain some set words of thanksgiving, but they sounded very hollow in the lips. In weariness and sorrow, she threw off her dress and sat before the glass; and the glass showed that her face was worn with perplexity and sorrow, and her eyes red with tears, and although her past life of anxiety had told somewhat on the fulness of her perfect figure, yet the general physique remained uninjured in all its thorough development. Her hair released from the

comb fell in full, long tresses to her waist.

“What have I done wrong?” she murmured in sad protest; “this engagement was forced upon me. Frank would have lost his life if he had returned to Tiflis; we are not to be married for one whole year. I have thought of others as well as myself; they are to have their just share in that property of his—and as for me, am I to be doomed to perpetual widowhood when God has made me love so deeply—because that mad jealousy must live beyond the grave?” But notwithstanding the justice of her protest, the recollection of her late husband’s animosity and rancour against her re-marriage grew intensely vivid, and the old words of cruelty crushed into her soul with all the force of actual utterance. “No,” she cried vehemently, “I tell you no, Jacob. Death stands between us now; I am free before God and man. I am his promised wife; I belong to him: his, as long as I live; his, through all eternity.”

Nevertheless, the words of Jacob could not be effaced from her soul: she could not sleep, and in the darkness of the night, in that borderland betwixt wakefulness and sleep, when the trammels of reason which bind the thoughts are loosed, and the thoughts wander into the channels of the impossible rendered terribly possible by the absence of mental control, she saw once more the smile of the dead man's face, against which all words of justice, or argument, or reproach had been urged in vain.

She mercifully fell asleep with the dawning light, and when she awoke the sun was shining brightly. She flung open the window of her room and gazed into the garden. Everything looked so fresh and pleasant and hopeful in the morning light; the morbid terrors of the night were forgotten in the sense of healthy life.

“I have work to do to-day which will make me think of others and forget myself,” she exclaimed thankfully—“I am

going to make those people love and honour me. Oh, Jacob, I know you have made all this possible through that will. I'm not ungrateful, indeed I'm not ; I must always love and honour you for that."

The heart of Mrs. Corley was carried at the bayonet-point of generosity ; that hard, mean, petty conglomerate, which performed the functions of a heart in Mrs. Corley's nature, was struck by the potent rod which Mabel wielded, and there welled out therefrom a copious stream of watery gratitude and unfeigned astonishment. How Mabel got possession of that rod was, indeed, for the time a standing miracle to Mrs. Corley. She had herself succeeded in constructing a thoroughly religious life upon the basis of covetousness and meanness—envy, hatred, and malice—a radical change of foundation would have been difficult ; but a superstructure of faith and sound evangelical principles had been raised at a comparatively small cost, and although there may

have been some difficulty in dovetailing the two portions of Mrs. Corley's structure, still it looked well enough from the outside to ordinary eyes.

The fear of the Lord was the watchword of Mrs. Corley's household. The various members were coerced by this fear, from Mr. Corley himself down to the Irish char-woman who had been mercifully plucked from the errors of Rome, which she didn't understand, and had been converted to Protestant truth of which she was equally ignorant, because she had a large family dependent upon her exertions, and her lot had been cast in a strong Protestant neighbourhood : she retained, however, under both forms of her theological ignorance, the same doubts as to the moral rights of dripping, candle-ends, and small coal.

So Mrs. Corley governed her household through the fear of the Lord, and she carried her system of petty worrying meanness into all the branches of her household management. She was herself subject to

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one fear—the fear of her servants; and in the fear of their abrupt departure her despotism was tempered at a certain point of tyranny; but as her husband and children did not possess the option of leaving the house, they were helplessly subject to the full power of an iron theocracy. Mr. Corley's lot was, however, mercifully mitigated through the temporary relief afforded by business hours in the City.

It must be mentioned that, in an age of scepticism, Mrs. Corley had never entertained any theological doubts; the subject of miracles had never caused her any inward questionings; her faith was unimpeachable with regard to divine interposition in the ordinary operations of nature; but when Mabel, the woman she had hated and spited, and had endeavoured to injure in a hundred mean ways, stood before her, and declared that she voluntarily relinquished the third part of her wealth to Mrs. Corley, as sister of the late Mr. Vaughan, and moreover, when Mabel asked Mrs. Corley to

love her and accept her love and goodwill in return, then Mrs. Corley, with all the smallness of her mind and pettiness of her disposition, was utterly bewildered.

The sudden appearance of an angel in her dining-room would have been far more comprehensible, but that human nature could be thus great and noble and generous and self-denying, passed the bounds of her belief; nevertheless, there stood Mabel in flesh and blood, and thirty-three thousand odd tangible pounds were waiting the pleasure of Mrs. Corley.

“But why, why, Mabel?” gasped Mrs. Corley, deeply affected.

“I consider it my duty,” answered Mabel simply. “I wrote to you from the first, that you might rely upon my doing my duty with regard to the property so generously confided to my keeping; until matters were fully ascertained by Mr. Barton, I was unable to name the amount; one third for you, and one third for the widow and children of Isaac Vaughan.”

The emotion was too much for Mrs. Corley : " My salts, Corley."

" Yes, my dear," answered Mr. Corley, who was himself greatly moved ! " a little brandy, my love ? " he suggested tenderly.

" Just a thimble-ful," murmured Mrs. Corley ; " it will give me heart."

That sip of brandy did give Mrs. Corley heart, as far as alcohol could serve as a substitute for the milk of human kindness.

" Go down on your knees, Corley, and bless her," cried Mrs. Corley, with fervour, " and thank Heaven for having put this thought into her generous soul."

Mr. Corley was preparing to obey. " For mercy sake," pleaded Mabel, " if you don't want me to run away."

" Well, at least I'll speak the truth," exclaimed Mrs. Corley emphatically. " I don't deny, Mabel, that I was angry when you stood between my blessed children and that property of his ; I don't deny that I have said wrong and bitter things. Yes, yes

—it does me good to make a clean breast of it—I don't deny that I did suspect you of loving that young man.”

Mabel's face blushed crimson.

“My love!” interposed Mr. Corley diplomatically.

“I will speak out,” persisted Mrs. Corley. “Maria Corley never palters with the truth. I did say, shame upon me, that you had gone to see him on that fatal day; but your conduct since poor Jacob's departure, convinces me that I misunderstood your feelings and actions. I know that you have never met that gentleman from the day of Jacob's death, up to the present time—and I'm sure that's proof enough that you didn't love him then, and that you don't love him now.”

Mabel could not trust herself to make any answer, but she felt very embarrassed. “Come now,” continued Mrs. Corley, “I've had my say, and I've said I'm very sorry, but words won't bring poor Jacob back,” and Mrs. Corley wept.

“My love,” expostulated Mr. Corley meekly.

“I oughtn’t to wish him back—I know that. It’s wicked to say so,” and Mrs. Corley wiped her eyes. “Resignation is the duty of all real Christians.”

“Amen,” said Mr. Corley solemnly. “Do I understand that I am to call on Mr. Barton?” he inquired eagerly of Mabel.

“If you please; the business arrangements for the transfer are in his hands; he will tell you all the details. Of course the money is to be settled on Mrs. Corley and the children.”

“Of course,” chimed in Mrs. Corley. “Oh, Mabel, dear, we shall remember you night and morning in our prayers—shan’t we, Corley, love?”

“Certainly, my dear; morning and night,” echoed Mr. Corley, but his fervour was somewhat chilled by the thought of an entire settlement of the money on his wife.

“Not alone shall we bless you in our own prayers,” continued Mrs. Corley, with en-

thusiasm ; “but we shall bless you at the altar of the household. Fetch me the book of family prayers, Corley, and a pen.”

“What are you going to do?” inquired Mabel in some dismay.

“Mem.,” answered Mrs. Corley, writing in the fly-leaf of the book, “to pray night and morning for our benefactress and dear sister-in-law, Mabel Vaughan.” Mrs. Corley blotted and closed the book. “And more than this,” she added, addressing her husband, “when you pray for Mabel, you shall pray that we may be permitted one day to do something that may testify to our gratitude.”

“Certainly, my love, by all means,” responded Mr. Corley.

“Your love and good feeling are all I want,” exclaimed Mabel.

“If the day comes on which we can do more, it shall be done,” said Mrs. Corley with emphasis—“eh, Corley?”

“Decidedly, my love, it shall be done,” answered Mr. Corley with warmth.

“One kiss, Mabel,” pleaded Mrs. Corley, “one kiss of forgiveness.”

“No, no,” responded Mabel with fervour — “a kiss of good-will, and love, and trust and confidence for evermore,” and Mabel threw her arms round Mrs. Corley’s neck and kissed her. Mrs. Corley’s kiss in return was as warm and heartfelt a kiss as Mrs. Corley was capable of giving. It was well enough, and it conveyed its satisfaction to Mabel; but it was not the great true kiss that Miss Lindsay could give when she chose to give a kiss—not that grand kiss welling up from the depths of a noble nature, and a heart of steadfast love.

Mabel’s next visit was to the widow and children of Isaac Vaughan. Isaac had been an essentially unprosperous man during his lifetime, and a lack of prosperity was in itself a crime in his brother’s eyes; he had moreover married in direct opposition to Jacob’s wishes, a lady who was by faith a Roman Catholic. After this marriage, Jacob had persistently refused him all

assistance in his ineffectual struggles with misfortune, and the lot of his widow and numerous children would have been perforce a very hard one, for Jacob was relentless in his animosities, if Mabel had not secretly afforded them all the assistance in her power during her husband's lifetime.

The widow and her children gathered round Mabel when she entered their house, and the young children clung to her with cries of joy, for her presence had ever been a harbinger of good; but when Mabel declared the purpose of her visit in all its importance, the cries of joy were stilled by an amazement which restrained even the youngest child. They shed tears all round, Mabel as well as the rest, for they felt that common words were not good enough for such a great occasion, and they all clung to Mabel in a state of dumb gratitude and adoration.

So Mabel's great task was done, and she returned home rejoicing greatly. She had arranged to return to Torquay that after-

noon by the express train. She hurried upstairs, and once more to *their* room. She opened the door and locked herself in. Jacob Vaughan had inhabited that room so long, that it seemed to Mabel as if in some strange manner he must be nearer to that room than to any other place on earth, and in any event that room was the one spot of all others which was most vividly associated in her mind with his life.

Her thoughts ran half in low speech and half in self-communion.

“I am very happy, Jacob, and I owe all this happiness to you, because you have given me the power of doing this work of justice and right, and you have enabled me to clear my character in the eyes of all these people, and gain their love and goodwill. If it is permitted you to know what I have done, I know you will feel as happy as I do, because I am certain that those petty feelings of animosity which stand forth in such strong relief in this mortal life must fade away into nothingness in that

awful world of souls. What you would wish to do now I have done, and I believe that as God's mercy places all this joy in my heart, so God's mercy, in His Almighty power, will bear to you the knowledge that I have performed this act of common justice by your own flesh and blood ; and I believe, because I feel so much joy in my heart, that the hard words are all revoked, and that the curse which you uttered in this world of time has never found an entrance into the world of eternity. Oh, Jacob, I think you must love me now!" she cried, bursting into tears.

Mabel returned to Torquay. Mary Smith marvelled at the brightness of her sister's face as she entered the house.

"Oh, Mary," she cried in gleeful exultation, "all his relatives love me at last ; kiss me, kiss me, I am so happy."

And Mary kissed Mabel in her quiet, calm manner of inward restraint and secret protest.

Deep into the night did Mabel sit up in

her room writting a letter to Frank Foster.

“DEAREST FRANK,

“Be as surprised as you like! Why, lo and behold, your pious, stiff Puritan wife (always your wife in God's sight, darling), has broken through her stern injunctions, and, instead of waiting for a whole month, has, in less than forty-eight hours written a letter to you. I can't help it; I must have you know how happy I am. God seems, in His boundless love and mercy, to cast His sanctification on my heart; to make my love for you still greater and holier; and it seems to me, in some strange way, as if this love of mine was His chosen way of raising me to a nobler life. I feel it has cast out of my heart a great deal of the old leaven of malice and uncharitableness. Don't smile at what I write. I was always taught to see God's hand in all things. You can't tell how new and strange it is for me to breathe an atmo-

sphere of love, after living a life of hard feeling and bitterness with all around—and now they all love me; this is God's bright sunshine which our holy love has shed upon my heart. Let Miss Lindsay read this letter, Frank; she has so often seen me sad, that I should like her to know my joy—downhearted, distrustful, faithless, and now so full of faith, and trust, and hope."

In obedience to its injunctions, after Foster had read Mabel's letter, he read it aloud to Miss Lindsay.

"Amen!" she ejaculated when the reading was finished. "Be very thankful; the Lord has given you a wife with a great and noble heart. Some women are sent into this world—or perhaps the Devil, I'm not quite sure, afterwards turns them to his cursed purpose—to drag down and degrade men; but you may reverence, and, I say, worship this wife of yours; her heart is a rare piece of God's true handiwork; it only lacks the last touches of His saving grace

to make it perfect, always excepting that inherent taint of original sin which grace hides. Cling to her, and she must lead you right. You men want a lot of leading, I can tell you; original sin being especially strong in men. And I tell you to rejoice greatly in that this love of yours is bestowed upon a woman who, through the power of love, will be able to teach you more real good than all books, and priests, and preachers in the world."

"Amen!" responded Foster in his turn. He could not trust himself to speak, but he carried off the letter to the silence of his own room. It may be that the cold shade of modern doubt had passed over his belief; that she was right in saying that her feelings were not his; but the great argument of her love dispelled many doubts from his mind, and he felt that faith, at least, and constancy and love were *real* things, and not mere vibrations of nerve fibre.

"Well," cried Miss Lindsay, looking across the table with triumphant exulta-

tion, "what next, I wonder? This vile wretched game of yours is finished, I suppose—worked out, hey? Not Mabel's soul for your crown, you scoundrel; the holiness of true love protects her. You can't touch her now, I say; the Lord may try her in His mercy with many troubles and many sorrows, but your temptations are all in vain; only one point of attack was ever open to your spite, the steadfastness of her love, but that vulnerable part in her armour of nobleness is invulnerable now. Come, I'm all ready for a new campaign," she added defiantly. "Don't fancy I'm sitting quietly here because I'm tired, or daunted, or afraid of your devilish tricks: I'm only waiting for the Lord's orders. I'm all ready to go here or there, or wherever the Lord wills, at half an hour's notice. Recollect, the old armour is burnished up, and the true and tried sword is sharpened like a razor, and the 'Brazen Vessel' creates hundreds of new prayers every week, and my second cousin, once re-

moved, at Glasgow, the Reverend Donald MacTonans—you know him well enough, I'll be bound, though he and I have only just renewed the old family connection—well, he's a tower of strength, a big voice, and plenty of downright stamina for hard praying, and he's got all Glasgow at his back—good, strong, stout prayers, mind—none of your amateur lispings on soft cushions, but hard words, 'straight out from the shoulder, and no mistake,' as my brother Bob used to say—I can hear him now, bless him!—of the old school fights years ago. Ah! those happy days when he and I were children together in that bright glorious Edinburgh, and he went to the High School, and I went to that dear good old dame's. Ah me!" and Miss Lindsay's thoughts wandered back to the days long passed. "Ah, Bob!" she cried, "dear Bob!" and the tears came into her eyes, "you shall never be ashamed as you stand in God's sight of your 'little Madge.'—'Forward, forward!' it's the old motto of

our crest, and that scoundrel shall never see my back ! By the Lord's blessing, I'll fight my battle against the Devil and all his lies, as you fought your fight bravely, to death and victory."

CHAPTER XII.

THE ENEMY SHOWS HIS HAND.

IN the fulness of heart and the fervour of her gratitude for the great gift of Frank Foster's love, Mabel did many acts which she fondly hoped would be accepted by Heaven as tokens of her humble but devout gratitude. They were perhaps not very wise acts, but for their wisdom she was not responsible. In the enthusiasm of her heart, she followed where others led, and Mr. Simeon was an accredited minister of the gospel, and her sister Mary was learned in all the ways of grace. Mr. Simeon's chapel of ease duly received its three coats of sound white flatted paint

per contract with a thoroughly low church decorator and house painter, plumber, etc., a pew-holder, formerly reprobate, but now in a state of grace, although trading on borrowed capital. Certain chromatic stencillings were proposed in accordance with present fashion.

“Are they Scriptural?” inquired Mary, in her plain simple manner, but earnestly and to the point. On failure of the required proof by the decorator, these stencillings were peremptorily forbidden.

Fifty pounds’ worth of small cotton drawers were duly despatched to certain reliable agents in Morocco for the partial clothing of the little Barbary Jews. Mary held that this gift was of a truly Scriptural character, and fully capable of Scriptural proof—the material was purchased of a draper, also a pew-holder, at a reduction on the retail price. The quality was perhaps not quite first-rate, but on the whole, it was as good as the conscience of the draper, having regard to his own legitimate

profits, permitted him to supply, and a quasi-religious character was conferred on the garments themselves through their being cut out and made up at Dorcas Meetings, strictly composed of thoroughly evangelical persons, whose fingers were animated by a deep sense of the blessed nature of their needle-work.

Finally, at the joint and earnest instance of Mr. Simeon and Mary, Mabel gave a very large cheque for the purpose of converting Irish Roman Catholics to Christianity. The Scriptural character of this donation was proved most satisfactorily to Mabel, as also its special accordance with the will of Heaven. In addition to all these distinctly religious acts, Mabel was never weary in conferring large and small gifts tending to the comfort and material well-being of her parents and sister. It must be particularly noted that Mary received all these gifts in a thoroughly religious spirit; the justness of her earlier views with regard to the reception of mundane benefits had been strength-

ened in the course of her spiritual progress. She now regarded Mabel as a mere instrument or medium in the Divine economy for the distribution of these blessings, and she accordingly thanked her with calm, quiet thanks, but she did not fail to pour fourth the fervour of her gratitude at the Throne of grace. Mr. Smith, on the other hand, had not so entirely cast off the taint of the old Adam, and although the awe of Mary kept him in restraint, still, in secret, when he and Mabel were alone, although he felt he was doing wrong, nevertheless he could not help giving way to his natural infirmity, and though he said but little (he never had said very much throughout the course of his earthly career), he could not help blessing Mabel for her goodness to them all, and thanking Heaven for having bestowed such a loving daughter upon him.

There was great comfort to Mabel in this warm affection, and although she felt that her father was wholly ignorant of the terrible nature of the sacrifice she had

endured, still, love is love, and bears a blessing even in its ignorance.

Mary felt very justly elated at the very satisfactory spiritual advancement made by her sister.

"You have much to be devoutly thankful for, darling Mabel," she observed one day as they were sitting together.

"I am very thankful," rejoined Mabel warmly, "very thankful."

"At one time, I frankly confess," continued Mary, "that I trembled lest that great access of wealth should choke up your soul; but hitherto, and I say it joyfully, it has not had that lamentable effect. Perhaps, as I said before, you may have been unduly lavish in the distribution of that large sum of money, and although I quite feel that Mrs. Corley may have had some claim upon your bounty, still I cannot say that I quite approve of your bestowing so much upon the children of a Roman Catholic mother."

"They are the children of Mr. Vaughan's own brother," pleaded Mabel.

“But still, darling,” urged Mary, “it seems to me, speaking with all humility, that we ought not to overlook religious error. I believe Mrs. Corley is sound in faith, and has always brought up her family in the way of true Protestant religion ; but, alas ! Mrs. Isaac Vaughan is avowedly a partaker in the sin of the mother of abominations and lies.”

“She has always tried to do her best for her family on very small means,” rejoined Mabel.

“That is merely a moral duty, and a carnal act,” answered Mary with some slight, very slight, tone of asperity. “The very animals round us take care of their young. I do not wish to argue this very palpable question ; I am willing to believe you have acted for the best—enough of this. But what I do desire most particularly to insist upon,” and Mary’s voice grew very earnest, “is the large, nay abundant measure of Christian privileges which are mercifully vouchsafed to you.

Mr. Simeon is indeed a truly Christian pastor, and full of godly edification. It seems to me that you have nothing to do in this world but grow in grace from year to year, to ripen, as it were, as the fruits ripen beneath the blessed warmth of heaven. You are rich enough, if your money be judiciously invested in sound securities, avoiding all foreign bonds—a source, I learn, of great mental anxiety to many sincere Christians—to be free from all carking worldly cares; you have literally no duty to do which ought to interfere with the care of your own soul. It is of course your bounden duty to think sometimes about others and do good to others, but your first thought and your first care must always be for your own spiritual progress.

“You have, I am glad to believe, been able to conquer that ill-advised and intemperate error of your girlhood, the love for that young man.” Mabel trembled violently and blushed crimson at her sister's words, but Mary was so deeply engaged in

framing her own sentences that she did not perceive her sister's emotion. "I would not for worlds," continued Mary, "speak uncharitably of any one; but I do confess that I always entertained certain misgivings as to the soundness of Mr. Foster's views on spiritual matters: fortunately, however, any errors of that kind on his part, do not now concern you or your eternal welfare." Mabel could not speak; she wished indeed that her secret should still be a secret, even from her sister; but in addition to this, it was absolutely crushing to her soul to hear such words spoken of that love which she felt was God's greatest gift of mercy. "Yes, Mabel, dear," said Mary after a short pause, "let me beseech you, from henceforth, to give up all idea of another marriage, which must inevitably distract your thoughts from serious objects, and lead you astray from the one great object of your earthly pilgrimage, the perfecting of your soul for the heavenly kingdom. Let me ask you soberly, ought

a love for some poor erring human creature to weigh against the eternal interests of your own soul? is human love worth that cost?" It was the old question, born of asceticism, which has been asked and answered through all the Christian ages of the world.

Mabel had her answer—the answer of healthy human nature, also God's work—and the words of rejoinder burnt on her lips; but Mary was so weak, so evidently incapable of enduring the hard words of argument, that Mabel held her peace.

"Kiss me, darling," murmured Mary, fatigued by the effort she had made; and Mabel kissed her sister. "Remember, you have nothing more to do, dearest," said Mary, languidly; "you have only to let your soul ripen quietly into perfect grace. I'll try to sleep a little now," she added; and she turned her face from the light and closed her eyes.

Shortly after Mabel's return to Torquay, Mrs. Corley wrote a letter to her, announc-

ing the engagement of her eldest daughter to a gentleman who promised to prove in every respect a most eligible husband ; a gentleman of sufficiently matured age, of thoroughly domesticated habits, methodic and exact in all the pursuits of life ; and, above all, gifted with eminently sound religious principles tending towards Calvinistic strictness ; in a word, a husband calculated in every way to assure the solid happiness of a young but sensible girl.

“I don’t hesitate to confess to you, dear Mabel,” the letter continued, “that our beloved daughter owes her exceeding happiness in a great measure to your munificent gift to us. Mr. Mudford is far too prudent a man to enter into a matrimonial engagement out of the mere levity of love ; and I am persuaded that the knowledge of our fortune had its weight with him in making this offer.

“Mr. Mudford lives in a very handsome villa at Balham ; he has recently lost his

mother, who managed all his domestic affairs ; as you may imagine, his household fell into sad confusion, he was strongly advised by many judicious friends to marry, as lady-housekeepers are very often untrustworthy persons, and indeed, objectionable in many ways, particularly in the case of single gentlemen of a certain age ; this teaches us to behold the directing hand of Providence in all things, and our beloved child has thus been called to fill a station in life, which, I humbly trust the earnest efforts of her parents to endow her with a sound Christian training—thorough evangelical principles, and a useful knowledge of general housekeeping, together with the rudiments of cookery, will enable her to sustain with credit to herself and happiness to her dear husband. My two dear children, I call Mr. Mudford my son now, are both talking together in the room as I write, so pray excuse all blunders. He is perhaps not a very demonstrative lover, but I am glad to say Emily is too sensible to care for

the mere frivolity of courtship. It is all so sweet to a mother's ears ; I can catch a word here and there of their conversation, though they speak in quite a low whisper—they are talking over the plan, God willing, of their future life. Dear William has just told Emily that he always likes to dine punctually at six o'clock ; soup or fish as a rule, an entrée, some sort of joint or poultry, a light pudding or tart ; so you see Emily's prospects are thoroughly satisfactory and solid. I cannot write any more ; tears of joy will come into my eyes. With a thousand blessings for your love and goodness to us all.

“ Your ever grateful and affectionate sister-in-law,

“ MARIA CORLEY.”

“ Emily Corley is going to be married,” Mabel exclaimed to her sister after reading Mrs. Corley's letter.

“ So young,” observed Mary regretfully ; “ poor child, I trust it may prove no bar to her spiritual progress.”

“Mrs. Corley says that Mr. Mudford, her intended husband, is a very religious man.”

“I always endeavour to hope for the best,” answered Mary, in a tone of despondency; “but men, men,” she exclaimed with a sigh, “men are very deceitful in the scales; the religion of intended husbands is oftentimes very different from the religion of married men. I have seen men who were never tired of going to church before marriage, become very lukewarm afterwards.”

“Well, come,” said Mabel, by way of diversion, “I’ve made up my mind what I shall give her for a wedding present, her uncle’s diamonds.”

“I am no advocate for the adornment of our vile bodies,” protested Mary, “but still those diamonds are very valuable; they might be sold—the worldlings would wear them in their sin—and the proceeds might be spent in sound curates——”

“They were a gift,” rejoined Mabel. “I trust, poor girl, they may make her happier

than they made me. I shall be very happy when they leave my possession."

Mabel had never trusted herself to look at those diamonds from the day of her husband's death. She had deposited them in their case, at the bottom of a very handsome dressing-case which she had never cared to use, one of Mr. Vaughan's many lavish gifts. When she went upstairs to her room, she locked the door to prevent the servant coming in, and opening the dressing case, took out the box containing the diamonds. She involuntarily shuddered as she touched the velvet cover; the first feeling of depression which had beset her since her return to Torquay.

"I won't look at them," she said, "I'll put the case up in paper; Mr. Simeon shall take it when he goes up to town next week." She thought, however, that she might as well assure herself that the diamonds were safe in the box. She touched the spring, the case flew open; yes, there were the diamonds glittering

before her eyes : she quickly averted her head, the sight was too painful. "Thank God ;" she cried, with fervour, "all that sorrow, all that anguish of perplexity and doubt has passed away for evermore." Still turning away her face, she closed back the lid, but the spring would not catch ; she opened the box to ascertain the cause ; a large envelope had fallen down from the top of the lid, where it must have stuck, and lay over the diamonds. There was writing on it, evidently Jacob Vaughan's handwriting ; the words were, The *last* will of Jacob Vaughan ;" the word "last" was underlined. In an instant, the fearful truth flashed into her mind, she had been living in a fool's paradise ; this, then, was the realised threat of the dying man, the testament of his undying jealousy and vengeance.

"Not now, oh God, not now !" she gasped, "not now, I say ;" she sank into a chair, and, without the power of action, she gazed with a sickening fascination at

the terrible document. "Not now," she pleaded in accents of agony, "it will kill me! Oh, not now! now that I have known what it is to be happy, now that I have striven to make all around me happy; now that I love!" She started up with a shriek, as if a red-hot iron had touched her heart, and then again she sank down helpless into the chair. There lay the envelope, but the handwriting grew dizzy as she gazed upon it. "I must," she muttered, after a long pause of silent agony, "I must read it; give me strength, oh, merciful Lord, give me strength; give me sight to read it; don't leave me now, don't leave me, or I shall go mad." She struggled to regain her self-possession; with hands that trembled violently she grasped the envelope, and, with intense effort, broke the black seal—Jacob Vaughan's crest. She strove to read the document, but the words danced before her eyes: by dint of determined resolution she did read it at last, every word, to the last word, and the

last words contained the strength of Jacob Vaughan's curse, and then she swooned away, holding the document clenched in her hand.

When she recovered her senses, the shadows of evening had drawn in; she heard her mother's voice outside, "Anything wrong, Mabel, dear?"

"It's all right, mother; I was rather tired. I have been lying on the bed; I shall be downstairs presently. Don't wait for tea; you can keep a cup for me."

She rose up from the floor; the fatal document lay at her feet; the clenching of her hand had somewhat crumpled the paper; she carefully smoothed it out, and replaced it in the envelope, and then she turned away with a pitiful cry of anguish, and almost involuntarily sank down on the carpet, helpless in the very agony of her soul. "If I marry again, I am a beggar," she muttered; "they are beggars, without a roof to cover them; the wife and children of Isaac Vaughan are beggars, too, if I

marry. Oh, great God! shall a man do this thing and die; do this horrible thing, which will be the enduring agony of a living being's life; do this cruel thing for the sake of a senseless feeling of miserable jealousy, and then die, the day of repentance gone for ever?" She rose to her feet, and her thoughts turned with bitterness against her late husband. "Look on me, Jacob, from heaven or hell," she cried fiercely, "Look on me, I say, and behold the cruel injustice of your hands. The pain will cling to you as it does to me. There lies the wretched paper; you would give worlds now to tear it up, and be quit of this awful suffering; you would give worlds, if you could, to bid me tear it up, and save you from this agony—save us both from this intolerable suffering. No, alas! the day of revocation is passed for ever, Jacob; this will of yours will be safe in my bosom, next my living flesh, till I deliver it into Mr. Barton's hands." She took up the envelope and placed it care-

fully in her bosom. "It will lie next my heart, with all its mean hate and hideous spite, next my beating heart, full now of holy love, with all its deadly enmity, with its cursed choice of a withered life or beggary; your widow, or married and a beggar; all around me, all who cling to me for comfort and support, for very bread, beggars; or——" and as the terrible thought flashed into her mind, she shrank back with a shudder. "No, no! Oh, merciful God, not that! not this noble love of mine, not this holy gift flung down, degraded! not that awful shame,—not his mistress! Oh God!" she cried in bitter anguish, "not this desecration of that holy thought which sanctified my life, his bride, in the white robe of purity and honour; tear this love from my heart, first; kill me; not that shame, not that turning of Heaven's light into darkness."

Her mother again knocked at the door.

"Mabel, dear, as soon as you can, please. Mary is rather fatigued this evening, and

she would like to see you before she goes up to her room."

"I shall be down directly," Mabel answered. Her mother's summons altered the current of her thoughts. "Oh, Lord," she cried, throwing herself on her knees—"help me now; I have no other help. I am quite alone, good Lord; they all love me deeply; my father, and mother, and Mary, but they can't help me. They don't feel what I feel—my own kindred!—but I am a stranger to their hearts; make me brave and true; in all these engrossing thoughts of self, don't let me forget that *they* must never want for comfort and support, as long as I have the power of helping them; don't let the thought of that first duty ever leave my mind through all this fearful struggle." She rose up, and feeling carefully that the will lay safely in her bosom, went downstairs.

END OF VOL. I.

FOUR STUDIES OF LOVE.

BY A. W. DUBOURG,

JOINT AUTHOR OF THE COMEDY, "NEW MEN AND OLD ACRES."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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I.

SAVED BY LOVE.

(AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.)

Continued.

AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.



CHAPTER XIII.

MISS LINDSAY DONS HER ARMOUR IN HASTE.

WHEN Mabel entered the sitting-room, they were all struck by the appearance of her face ; the traces of recent tears were indeed plainly visible. Mr. Simeon had come by invitation to enjoy a brace of partridges, the first of the season, which were in process of roasting for supper. Mr. Simeon's presence acted as a certain restraint on Mabel's feelings ; she felt thankful for his presence, however, because she was very anxious that Mary should be as little agitated as possible by the narrative of her important discovery.

She told the story with wonderful nerve and calmness, and she prefaced it by declaring most emphatically that, come what might, the Torquay arrangements would remain as heretofore ; that their home and essential comforts would continue unchanged. This kind and considerate declaration on the part of Mabel, had a very assuaging effect on the anxiety which the discovery of the new will would otherwise naturally have occasioned. Mary, indeed, although she was this evening more than ordinarily fatigued, was thus enabled with perfect calmness to express her usual common-sense, and at the same time thoroughly religious, views with regard to the situation of affairs.

“I will not permit myself,” she said, speaking in a very modest but at the same time decided tone, “to express any opinion on Mr. Vaughan’s conduct, because I might be led to use uncharitable language on the subject, and uncharitable language can never, under any circumstances, be justified in the sight of Heaven. I will only say,

that I fear the old Adam still lingered in poor Mr. Vaughan's heart; and this sad apprehension certainly entitles him to our commiseration as an unrepentant sinner. It is important for us, however, to express our infinite gratitude to Heaven that, in a temporal sense, carnal things have been really so little changed by this new arrangement of the estate. As far as I understand dear Mabel's account of the will, Mrs. Corley takes half the property absolutely; the other half, together with the house, furniture, and effects, plate included, is settled upon Mabel for life."

"Or until she marries," volunteered Mr. Smith very meekly.

"Did you say that, Mabel?" asked Mary, slightly, very slightly, ruffled by her father's interruption.

"Father is quite right," answered Mabel, endeavouring to conceal her feelings. She clenched her hands under the table; they could not therefore observe the action.

"Well," exclaimed Mary, "I do not think,

in forming our estimate of affairs, that we need lay too much stress upon that point. I have myself never been an advocate for second marriages, and I must say I think Mr. Vaughan was perfectly justified in giving evidence of his feelings upon that point; so, with this additional limitation—for life or until marriage—dear Mabel stands possessed of quite sufficient means to give full effect to the generous feelings of her nature. I am not quite sure,” she added, in a tone of great diffidence—“it is, perhaps, too early to judge correctly; but I think we may see in this altered state of affairs, a manifest purpose on the part of Heaven, to check any undue leaning upon mere works, by curtailing to a certain extent this arm of the flesh—and perhaps, although the execution of Mr. Vaughan’s new will was undoubtedly antecedent to Mabel’s benevolent actions—still I am inclined to think that a large gift to persons partaking of the errors of Rome could not be otherwise than repugnant to the will of

Heaven. I speak, of course, very humbly upon such a profound subject—Mr. Simeon is fortunately at hand to correct my limited knowledge of Scriptural truth—but I venture to think that the monition of Heaven was, so to speak, antedated in that will with a view to correcting the subsequent errors of a loving but fallible human judgment.”

Mr. Simeon was deeply impressed by the great subtlety of Mary's theological views, and he hastened very warmly to endorse her opinion, adding thereto, on his own part, many very pertinent quotations from Holy Writ.

“Darling Mabel,” cried Mary warmly, and weak as she was, she drew her chair close to her sister, and kissed her with the utmost tenderness, tears standing in her eyes, “you can only err in one way, dearest—in listening too much to the promptings of a truly kind and benevolent human heart. But let us all rejoice in that it has pleased Heaven to root up some of those rank weeds from your earthly path, by diminish-

ing the temptation to rest on carnal works. Far from this new will being an evil, I am disposed to look upon its curtailments in the light of a great and signal blessing—a blessing of monition and godly correction; and yet a monition mercifully tempered by love, for all the comforts and solaces of our earthly pilgrimage, which we now enjoy so richly, might have been snatched away; but they are still vouchsafed to us abundantly, yea, in a full measure heaped up.”

Mary seemed, indeed, quite joyful at the end of her comments—as far, at least, as her weak bodily state permitted the expression of joy—but Mabel, though she strove as much as she could, was unable to restrain her tears. “Precious darling Mabel,” exclaimed Mary, with tender warmth, “I will pray very earnestly that you may be led at last into the happy path I am mercifully permitted to tread—that you may be at last vouchsafed a vision of the truth as I behold it.”

“Amen!” said Mr. Simeon very solemnly;

he would willingly have offered up a prayer fitted to the occasion, but Mabel could not have endured that torture. Very fortunately, however, Mary was too fatigued to enjoy the precious privilege so graciously tendered; and, leaning for needful support on Mabel's arm, she returned to her bedroom. Mabel helped her to undress. "Mabel, darling," exclaimed Mary as her sister was about to leave the room; "the Lord has sent you to be our comfort and support in earthly things; you must make me, as far as it lies in my feeble power, your help and comfort in spiritual difficulties. Good-night, dearest. Go down now, please; Mr. Simeon will be wanting his supper. I hope you will enjoy the partridges; these temporal blessings are not for me, but I do not repine—the man promised they should be young birds, but I fear he is not yet in a state of grace, and young birds, they say, are very scarce this year; but it is our duty to endure all things meekly. God bless you, darling sister."

Mabel did not go down to supper—she went to her own room, and sent an excuse by the servant. “Alone now,” she murmured, in her despair. “Oh, God, how fearfully alone I am!” She placed the will carefully under her pillow; she was resolved it should never leave her personal custody until it was safely delivered into Mr. Barton’s own hands. Deep into the night she lay awake, striving to unravel the many tangled threads of doubt, perplexity, dismay, and fear.

Mary’s doubts were but too well founded—it was manifest that the poulterer in question was still in an incomplete state of regeneration. One bird, indeed, was young and plump, but the other bird had seen far too much of the world of roots and the ways of men. Mr. Simeon, however, thoroughly enjoyed the young bird; the bread sauce and the brown gravy were both excellently made, and served very hot.

“I wish the dear girls upstairs had been with us,” said Mr. Smith warmly—he had

partaken of the old bird with great contentment; "but I fear dear Mabel feels this alteration deeply, although she says very little."

Mr. Simeon alluded very pointedly to Mabel in his prayer of thankfulness that evening—they all felt so unfeignedly thankful: nothing was to be altered in their life of quiet, substantial comfort; they could not help rejoicing greatly in their thankfulness. Mr. Simeon was induced, at Mr. Smith's earnest solicitation, to resume, for the first time that season, his one accustomed tumbler of hot whisky and water, which he enjoyed thoroughly; and meantime, close at hand, a great battle was being fought in a woman's soul.

Mabel went up to town by the earliest train on the following morning; the envelope containing the will was carefully stitched to the inside of her dress. On arriving at Paddington, she drove straight to Mr. Barton's office.

"Is Mr. Barton in his room?" she asked

anxiously of the clerk. To her infinite relief Mr. Barton was at the office, and able to see her without delay. Mr. Barton was naturally very surprised by this unexpected visit from his client.

“I have discovered Mr. Vaughan’s last will and testament,” she said, speaking in a low constrained voice, and, turning away for a moment from Mr. Barton, she drew the will from her bosom. “Thank God, it is now safe in your hands; my duty is over,” and she laid the document on Mr. Barton’s desk.

“Heyday!” cried Mr. Barton, as soon as he could recover from his astonishment; “who the deuce drew it?” He looked at the date and signatures. “Subsequent will, no doubt; ‘John Watson, solicitor, and his clerk, Henry Biggs.’ Watson died, if I remember rightly,” observed Mr. Barton, “a few days before Mr. Vaughan’s decease.”

“I remember that Mr. Watson came to see my husband two or three times, and had long interviews with him. Mr. Vau-

ghan told me it was about Sleaford's affairs ; he was their solicitor, I believe."

"Just so," answered Mr. Barton. "Where on earth did you discover it? I searched every possible hole and corner."

"In the top of the case which contains my diamonds—yesterday afternoon ; it was the first time the case had been opened since Mr. Vaughan's death. I was going to send the diamonds as a present to Emily Corley on her marriage."

Mr. Barton read through the will.

"Mr. Vaughan knew very well that I should never have drawn a will of this nature," he remarked in a grave voice. "Well, at all events, we have only one thing to do. I see I am joint executor with Mr. Corley ; the new will must be propounded, and the former will cancelled. Fortunately for all persons concerned, this discovery has been made before the distribution of the property, according to your very generous intentions, has been carried out. In itself, the will is clear enough. It restricts you to a life

interest in half the realized property—saving always to your use the house at Dulwich and general effects therein—or until your re-marriage—that acts as absolute forfeiture of everything. In order to ensure a provision for your family in case of your own decease, it will be of course advisable that you should immediately insure your life—clearly the sooner the better.”

He raised his head and looked at her.

“I should say that yours was a very good life, Mrs. Vaughan; a good, long, healthy life; just the sort of life offices like to accept.”

She bent down her face: a long life meant prolonged misery.

“Of course if you marry again,” he observed—“but such an act would be, under the present circumstances, speaking in the mildest terms, an act of insanity; we need not therefore take that point into consideration.”

Mr. Barton's eyes were old; he did

not perceive the agony which his client suffered.

“In that case, however, as in the case of your death, two-thirds absolutely of what you now hold for life would go to Mrs. Corley, and one-third to St. Ronald's Hospital.”

“I don't of course understand business matters,” faltered Mabel, striving to command her voice; “but would it be possible for me to surrender that portion of my interest to St. Ronald's Hospital, on payment by them of the sum equivalent to the value of my life?”

“I quite understand,” answered Mr. Barton; “but you must observe that the money falls to them on your re-marriage as well as on your death; how it would be possible equitably to assess those two conditions, I scarcely know. Then, again, we must remember that St. Ronald's Hospital is so notoriously wealthy. If Mr. Vaughan had only left his property to some struggling East-end hospital in a wretched district,

our course might have been easier ; but just consider the locality of St. Ronald's—the very centre point of the West end of London, surrounded by persons of enormous wealth—palaces indeed ; persons dwelling, too, in the very hotbed, so to speak, of religious influences of all kinds, high church, low church, and polite dissent—religion not only a faith, but a fashion ; and under every form of faith, continual appeals to charity as covering a multitude of sins. Could any institution be more likely to reap substantial advantages from such a state of affairs ? Many sins, most probably, and a great superfluity of money most certainly. Why, if they had only building space, they could half cover Hyde Park with bricks and mortar. I fear we can't hope for much help from the St. Ronald's people."

"But you could try," urged Mabel in anxious tone ; "you could make an offer, could you not ?"

"I could try, and will try, if you desire it," answered Mr. Barton ; "but I fear it is hopeless."

“Oh, do try!” cried Mabel with despair in her voice, for Mr. Barton’s words had blighted the one hope she had formed during her journey. Up to this point of their interview she had been so perfectly calm and self-possessed, that Mr. Barton was all the more astonished by her change of demeanour.

“Promise me faithfully to do your best,” she exclaimed with vehemence, and she rose from her chair and came close to his desk. “I will tell you the whole truth. I am in love; I am engaged to be married. Have mercy—have pity for me; I have had pity for others—you know that. Be my friend; help me if you can.” She clasped his hands, falling on her knees at his chair.

The words made Mr. Barton’s heart beat, although, indeed, he was an old man, and very matter-of-fact, and rather cynical, with a large store of worldly experience. He begged her to get up, he insisted upon her getting up. She obeyed him at last, and then, overwhelmed by a deep sense of

shame, she sank back into the chair she had previously occupied. But her feelings were stronger than shame, and they forced her to speak.

“Despise me as much as you will,” she exclaimed—“condemn me, if you choose; but I love with my whole heart and soul—I must love; no accursed will can destroy that; but I think, if you knew all, you would not despise me.”

“I do not despise you,” he answered. “God forbid! I have long honoured and respected you. I have never seen anything in your conduct which merited contempt, and at this moment I honour and respect you as much as ever.”

“God bless you,” she cried.

“I won’t deceive you by raising any false hopes; this will, as far as I now see, is, legally, a good and valid will. I fear very little can be done. I must have time to think, and I must ask you to leave me now, as I have a very urgent and important engagement.” He led her towards the door.

"Be brave and patient," he whispered in kindly words. "I'm not a preacher, my dear lady; I'm only an old cynical man of the world, but I may tell you that you have often preached to me."

"When?" asked Mabel with surprise.

"When you behaved like a true and noble woman," he answered.

The clerk opened the door and announced the expected client.

"Good-bye," he said, in a rather flurried manner; and Mabel followed the clerk out of the room.

The client brushed by Mabel as he entered the room, "Handsome client, egad! A widow, too—money, I say? Why, bless me, Barton, what the deuce?"

"I have been very much pained," answered Mr. Barton; "and these are a few tears."

"I should have thought you were too old for that."

"I should have thought so too," rejoined Mr. Barton dryly, and he wiped away the

tears. "Well, do those fellows intend to fight that bond or not?" and in another moment Mr. Barton was deeply absorbed in very important business.

So with her best hope rudely shaken, Mabel sought her lover at Miss Lindsay's residence, but her heart failed her; doubts are born of a downcast spirit. To have doubted her lover's constancy in the flush of wealth would have been an impossibility, but as the body is prone to contract diseases in its weakness, so the soul in its hours of depression falls a prey to doubt. "This love," she cried, "oh, Lord! leave me that, and I can bear all. I can bear the loss of wealth; I can endure the bitterness of dependency—the bitterness of all other sacrifices; but in mercy leave me his love; leave me that one pillar of faith on earth, and I shall be strong and brave."

It was weary walking up the garden path to Miss Lindsay's door. "Miss Lindsay was not at home," the maid said, "but Mr. Foster was in the parlour," and Mabel was

ushered into her lover's presence. He was amazed at her visit.

"Don't kiss me, Frank," she exclaimed, as he advanced towards her, "I have come to tell you something which is very sad; you must hear that first. Oh, Frank," she cried in a voice of deep concern, as she gazed at him, "you are not making proper progress; you are still looking wretchedly weak: what does the doctor say?"

"Don't be alarmed, darling; he says Germany—he's promised to let me go in a few days more."

"Sit down, Frank—no, not close to me; sit there. I will sit in this chair till I have told you all," and she sat in a chair somewhat removed from his. She told him the story of the new will, and the terrible penalty it contained. "If I marry again," she said in a deliberate voice, "I shall be a beggar. I asked you to marry a rich woman: if I marry you, I shall lose everything; we shall both be beggars. I am only doing my duty by releasing you from this engagement."

“Mabel!” he exclaimed in a voice of deprecation.

“I repeat, my duty; I do release you from this engagement.”

“Never!” he exclaimed. “I swear, never,” and he started up.

“Hear me to the end,” she continued. “I shall have nothing; you will have nothing : our first engagement was broken off on these grounds; we are older; are we less wise now?”

“A thousand times less wise,” he answered with vehemence; “a thousand times more true.” He came to her, and kneeling as she sat, clasped her in his arms and kissed her.

“Oh, Mabel, cruel Mabel, to doubt me now! You and I are one—joined by God’s mercy; nothing can divide us—mine on earth, mine in heaven!”

“Amen,” she cried with exultation. “Oh, Lord, with my whole heart and soul I acknowledge this mercy. I am very rich, I have lost nothing, because I possess all.

Oh, Frank, I can bear anything when you are at my side. My woman's heart falters when it is alone; but I am so strong now. You can guide me through it all—through this awful maze of perplexity." She threw her arms round his neck, clinging to him with fervent grasp: he was hers, then—love assured for ever; a sacred bond that naught could break bound them together. And yet, as she clung to him, her joy was presently clouded by a terrible thought, which, like the thin, keen edge of a steel wedge, was driven between their close-linked hearts—duty, the home at Torquay. She could endure poverty for herself, but not for them; how were they to live when she was a beggar? And her arms lost their force and fell from his neck, and she shrank away in absolute anguish from his grasp, and burst into tears.

"Oh, Mabel, why this sudden change?" he asked in amazement.

"I am without hope," she answered, starting up from her chair. "Mr. Barton

could give me no hope about any arrangement with St. Ronald's. I have no hope of mercy or consideration from Mrs. Corley ; I know she will never help me with a penny."

"But, Mabel, dear Mabel," he exclaimed in protest, "you are mine, whatever happens." He tried once more to clasp her to him.

"Leave me, Frank," she said mournfully. "A minute ago I held you so tightly in my arms that I thought in my fervour that no power on earth could drag you from me ; and then that torturing fear of *their* poverty rose in my mind. Could I be happy amid their reproaches—or rather their silent, uncomplaining endurance of poverty and privation?—the wealth that could have helped them, lost for the sake of my happiness!"

"But mine too," he answered in a tone of reproach.

"I was thinking of myself ; but I can't help that, for my marriage would be my happiness and their loss. God help me in

this agony," she cried. "That thought just now forced me from your arms; it would turn into bitterness all the joy of my marriage."

He turned away from her with trembling steps.

"Oh, Frank—perhaps it is not true; perhaps we are only deceiving ourselves; perhaps, after all, God has not given us to one another. I thought so, believed so, till this awful fear rose in my soul. Why can't we be heartless, and false, and mercenary, and so be saved from all this terrible pain?"

"Mabel," he gasped, "all this will kill me; I can't bear it," and he threw himself into a chair. In an instant she was at his side.

"Frank, darling Frank, I don't know what I am saying; I think my mind is losing itself with all this misery. Nothing shall divide us now. Oh, let us have faith, let us be brave; all will come right at last." But strive as she would, her words were only words of the lips; she saw that they

conveyed no assurance to her lover. It was a positive relief when Miss Lindsay entered the room.

“Heyday! bless me,” cried that lady in surprise; “you here, Mabel?”

“Thank Heaven you have come,” answered Mabel, and she flew to Miss Lindsay for support. “I see how ill he is; and I think my words will kill him,” she whispered.

“What’s the matter?” inquired Miss Lindsay, going to the point.

Mabel began her story.

“Beast!” cried Miss Lindsay, the moment the discovery of the new will was mentioned. “Not another word,” she exclaimed; “I know everything: you lose every penny if you marry again. Scoundrel!” And Miss Lindsay shook her clenched fist violently. “Oh, you villain, you have caught me napping, have you? Stolen a march on me, hey? So it’s out at last! You were so quiet too; just like a mischievous child destroying its toys. I wondered why

the Lord had not set me to some fresh work, but it's all plain now; I thought it was victory, but the battle isn't over. Oh, you pitiful hound! You made that poor, wretched, mean-spirited man execute this accursed will through vile jealousy; you made him hide it in the very place you thought his noble-hearted wife would be sure to look immediately after his decease; you made her find it when she was alone. You fool! you wanted to tempt her with that infernal temptation, did you? Destroy the wretched document in her despair, hey? I can see it all as plain as a pikestaff, and I'll say it out: you mean my dear noble girl to choose between a marriage of poverty, and a life of sin and shame!"

"For Heaven's sake," interposed Foster, "not those words, Miss Lindsay; not those fearful words!" Mabel sank into a chair, covering her face with her hands.

But Miss Lindsay in the heat of combat was too excited to give heed to Foster's

protest. "I will tell him his cursed schemes to his face," she cried, her countenance was flushed with anger and indignation. "It's best to let him know that we are up to his vile moves, that we are not afraid to grapple with him in his strength. I repeat, we are not afraid, with the Lord's help, to fight this great battle; these two children of mine are brave and noble, and in God's name we defy you and all your cursed crew. Just wait," she cried defiantly, "till I give the signal to the 'Brazen Vessel,' and sound the alarm in Glasgow; Donald MacTonans won't flinch, I'll warrant that." Miss Lindsay turned to Mabel: "He knows the stuff we are made of, dearest; we shall conquer him, never fear."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ENEMY CARRIES THE OUTWORKS.

THROUGH the discovery of the new will, Mrs. Corley's prayer that she might be one day enabled to show her gratitude for Mabel's generosity was very quickly answered. Mr. Barton's letter to Mrs. Corley announcing her good fortune, and also conveying a sketch of the general purport of the will, duly arrived by the morning's post, and lay on the breakfast-table when Mrs. Corley bustled into the room to make the tea before the family assembled for prayers. The intelligence was very sweet; next to exultation in the acquired money, was the delight of being free from all

obligation to the woman whom in her heart of hearts Mrs. Corley hated.

Mr. Corley with great readiness framed a very fervent extemporaneous prayer applicable to their altered fortunes, and he used it in lieu of the accustomed reference to Mabel. Mrs. Corley rose from her knees with a radiant countenance, and kissed her daughter Emily with great warmth, and, as soon as the servants had left the room, proceeded to enlighten both Emily and her betrothed, who was staying in the house, as to the cause of Mr. Corley's new prayer.

"If Mrs. Vaughan marries again," remarked Mr. Mudford, during the post-substantial or marmalade section of breakfast, "you gain a large increase at once."

"I maintain that a woman ought never to marry a second time," observed Mrs. Corley in a decisive tone, "more particularly if it be contrary to the express injunction of the husband to whom she owes all her fortune; I look upon such an act as impious."

Mrs. Corley's words established the hopelessness of Mabel's appeal for merciful help, and Mabel's own depression of soul as she approached Mrs. Corley's house, was only too true a foreshadowing of the fate which awaited her.

Mabel was never meant to bend the knee in supplication; her nature was constructed on the grand lines of generosity and self-denial, and the special teaching of her home-life, from the cradle upwards, had only served to strengthen those lines of nobleness. She was at her best and grandest, therefore, when giving to others, or being given for the sake of others; at her worst when she had to plead for her own self and her own advantage; but Mrs. Corley was never stronger than when she had self and selfishness to advocate. So the battle that Mabel had to fight was half lost before the first shot had been fired.

Mrs. Corley kissed Mabel on her entrance one of her thoroughly hollow kisses—which chilled Mabel through and through.

“Well, dear,” she exclaimed, leading Mabel to the sofa, “this change is a great surprise to us all. As far as I am concerned, it is a very precious satisfaction to feel that dear Jacob really loved me as a brother ought to love a sister, who has always striven to act in a truly sisterly manner. After all, my dear, remembering your very just division of the property under the old will, it will not make any very great difference to your earthly comfort, and you will be able, thanks to Jacob’s goodness, to be a comfort and support to your dear parents, and your poor afflicted sister, whose resignation and sweetness is a lesson to us all.”

“Amen,” said Mr. Corley, who had sidled into the room.

“You may be sure,” answered Mabel, “that I shall never forget my duty towards Mary; but I want,” she stammered—“although it is very painful to me, to say something about myself. By this new will I forfeit everything if I marry again.”

Mabel bent down her head as she spoke ; Mrs. Corley raised hers significantly towards her husband. "It places me in a very difficult position——"

"Well, my love," observed Mrs. Corley, "your dear husband was always deeply opposed to a woman marrying again—but, really, at the present time, considering that you are a widow of little more than three months, I don't think we need worry ourselves about an event which may never happen."

Mrs. Corley was silent; she felt convinced that Mabel was in love, she felt that the feelings of society were ranged against Mabel, and she revelled in her triumph.

So the initiative, with all its pain, lay on Mabel. It was an awful struggle; in the very delicacy of her feelings, she was strongly tempted for a few moments to close the conversation, and leave the house with her purpose unexecuted, and then she thought of the state of anguish and anxiety

in which she had left her lover, and she burst into tears.

“You said you would help me, when you could!” she exclaimed in painful tones; “for Heaven’s sake, help me now! I will tell the whole truth; I am engaged to be married, but not yet, not for a long time. Oh, Mrs. Corley, don’t turn from me—I say, I am not going to marry yet, God forbid—not till you approve of it, I promise that; but if I had not engaged myself to Mr. Foster, he would have left England and returned to that awful climate it was a case of life and death—life and death, on my solemn word. Have mercy on us both.”

“You can marry if you like,” answered Mrs. Corley; “this very day if you like—I can’t prevent you.”

“But I lose every penny,” rejoined Mabel, “and thirty thousand pounds become yours at once, and the house and everything.”

“I see it now,” exclaimed Mrs. Corley;

“my brother was quite right; he knew but too well that you loved that man—loved him, while you were yet his wife.”

“Only help me a little, that is all I ask,” pleaded Mabel, “help me as I helped you, when I held the right over that money.”

“Which, after all, was never yours,” exclaimed Mrs. Corley vindictively, “which never would have been yours, if that will had been searched for properly.”

“I only found it,” she protested meekly, “when I looked for the diamonds to send them to Emily as a wedding gift. I don’t ask a single penny for myself; I ask you to settle an allowance out of that thirty thousand pounds on my parents and Mary. I only ask that boon; he and I can live somehow; starve, if need be; but do have mercy upon them. If I err, let the punishment fall on me, but not on their heads.”

“You positively have the effrontery,” retorted Mrs. Corley, “to ask me to undertake the performance of your sacred family duties, and thereby enable you to act in

defiance of your late husband's most emphatic injunction."

"But, in mercy consider. Had he—has any man—the right to lay this awful burden upon a living being?"

"I will not argue this point, Mrs. Vaughan. I will not allow my brother's sacred wishes to be questioned by his widow. Once for all, if you marry, you take the consequences."

Mabel clung to her with tears, with prayers for mercy—kneeling at her feet—but it was all in vain. Mrs. Corley enjoyed her triumph to the full, and the approval of her conscience added greatly to her enjoyment; for she felt that she was giving effect in the most conscientious manner to the sacred injunctions of Jacob Vaughan.

It was indeed the first time in her life that Mrs. Corley had been enabled to enjoy thoroughly the pleasure of conscientious vindictiveness. So the dead man had his victory over the living woman.

"I'll be bound," exclaimed Mrs. Corley,

as soon as Mabel had left the house, "that she was engaged to that man immediately after Jacob's death—or very likely before. Don't tell me, she knew all about the real will from the first. It was a clever device with her pretended generosity to gain her ends over us. I always had the worst possible opinion of that woman; thank heaven, she is punished now."

The possible greatness of human nature was, indeed, a sore puzzle to Mrs. Corley; but she was eminently capable of understanding the theory of its meanness and depravity.

It had been arranged that Mabel should return to Miss Lindsay's house immediately after her interview with the Corleys; but she could not summon courage to meet her lover, to bear to him the evil tidings which involved the destruction of their dearest hopes. She wandered mechanically back to her own house—hers only in right of widowhood. She thought it would be best that she should not meet Foster again. She

purposed sending for Miss Lindsay, and letting her break to him the news of their inevitable separation; but she seemed in her misery to lack all force and strength for action. In the midst of her depression, Foster was announced.

“You didn’t come to me,” he said, when the servant had left the room. “I could not endure this torture of uncertainty—forgive me, I could not help coming to you. For heaven’s sake, what did they say; is there any hope?”

The emotion of intense anxiety might well have made a strong man weak; but Foster was still weak through the complaint which had been checked, but not vanquished. He sat, or rather sank helplessly into a chair.

“Frank, dear, it’s the worst,” she flew to his side. “Be strong and brave, my own darling. This is an awful time; let’s fight it nobly. Mrs. Corley will not help us.”

“I feared not,” he answered feebly; and

his head sank back, falling on her shoulder, as she knelt close to his chair.

She answered him in a firm voice, speaking with the utmost decision; for she strove to animate him with her own strength.

“We should possess nothing, if we married. If that were the only consideration, it would be my duty and my dearest happiness to marry you at all risks, but that household at Torquay stands between me and you.”

“I understand you, Mabel,” he answered, and he raised his head from her shoulder; her fortitude had made him strong—“I will try to bear this awful trial as bravely as I can, but I am not so brave as you are.”

“Very brave at heart, though still an invalid,” she answered. “Oh, let us have faith, Frank. Be sure some day, sooner perhaps than we think, God will let us marry. You will go to Germany of course,” she added timidly, “according to the old arrangement.”

“I think not,” he answered.

"But that arrangement must stand good," she exclaimed, in anxious voice, "Oh, please, say you will go."

"I can't promise, Mabel; I can't afford it."

"But I—I," she stammered, and she burst into tears, when she marked the expression on his face.

"Oh, Frank, I implore you to grant me this mercy—at least, till you are well and strong, till the work comes, Frank; nothing more."

"No, Mabel," and he rose with effort from his chair. "I cannot. If I lose you, I must respect myself."

"But they will send you back to Tiflis," she cried in a voice of agony. "Oh, Frank, not this cruelty; I suffer enough without this fearful burden. Have mercy on me."

"Mabel," he answered firmly; "I cannot bind myself with pledges. We must be free now—absolutely free. I must be a man, and not dependent on a woman for my living."

In her heart she felt he was right, but she could not speak.

“I had better go,” he said, “we are only torturing one another.” She did not dare to make any rejoinder.

“Good-bye, Mabel. Thank God, although we part, we part in honour, in self-respect, in true love. I do thank God for that,” he laid his hand on hers; her hand trembled, but there was no response to the pressure of his. He turned from her; he strove to find his hat, and then his strength gave way, the physical weakness he had conquered with intense moral effort resumed its sway, he groped towards the door, and suddenly staggered back. She flew to him, and this time she caught him at the moment of falling. He was insensible, and she sank to the floor holding him in her arms. She had fought the battle bravely, but she was vanquished now.

“I will never leave you, Frank, I swear that—never,” she cried, passionately; “be it sin, be it shame—never! That accursed

will has done its work. Shame from henceforth ; but no power on earth shall separate us."

Miss Lindsay had followed Foster to Mrs. Vaughan's house ; she entered the room as Mabel was clinging to her lover.

"Hey-day," she exclaimed, "what another of these fits of exhaustion ? "

"Yes," answered Mabel, "but this time I don't leave him ; this time he remains in my house."

"Mabel !" exclaimed Miss Lindsay, breathless.

"Listen to me," and Mabel rose to her feet, with fierce determined glance. Miss Lindsay had never seen such an expression in her face before. She looked unflinchingly into Miss Lindsay's eyes. "That man is henceforth my husband, married or not—you understand me ? "

"I do," answered Miss Lindsay, regaining her self-possession.

"Then this house is no place for you," continued Mabel, in a harsh voice.

“On the contrary, it’s the very place for me,” rejoined Miss Lindsay; “and what’s more, I mean to stop. Oh, you scoundrel,” she muttered in an undertone, as she went to ring the bell, “by the Lord’s mercy, we’ll beat you yet.” And she deliberately took off her bonnet and shawl; but her heart beat violently, and a sickening feeling of apprehension weighed upon her spirits.

CHAPTER XV.

'T WAS A FAMOUS VICTORY.

It was a relapse, and a serious one—the sitting-room, it was, in fact, the library, was converted into a bed-room, and Miss Lindsay and Betsy Brown took charge of the invalid by turns, one or the other always remaining in the room and assisting Mabel in her office of chief nurse.

A week of danger was passed, then a week of gradual convalescence. Mabel was absent from time to time on business matters. At the end of the second week, she informed Miss Lindsay that she had insured her life to the utmost possible amount, having regard to necessary income

—“so I’ve done all in my power for everybody, and whether I live or die it don’t matter.”

“When do you think of returning to Torquay?” inquired Miss Lindsay; “you say your sister Mary is not quite so well.”

“You mean,” answered Mabel—“when do I intend to leave Frank Foster? Never!” It was a challenge to Miss Lindsay to continue the subject, but Miss Lindsay obstinately held her peace.

“You have kissed me every night,” said Mabel; “I have no right to take those kisses from you; I am not worthy of them.” Again Miss Lindsay vouchsafed no reply, she appeared to be lost in a state of abstraction.

“Isinglass,” she suddenly exclaimed; “I want two ounces; give me your keys!” she snatched up Mabel’s keys and left the room. She felt dreadfully depressed, dreadfully downcast. She hurried to her own room. “That poor girl,” she murmured, “is great either for good or evil. Oh, you

cowardly beast, to attack her like this—to thrust your cruel sword into the one vulnerable point of her noble nature ; unswerving constant love. You tried to drag her down by ministering to selfish greed, that first will—by secret crime, the destruction of that accursed second will—but those temptations fell from her like water, and now you fasten your accursed fangs into the very nobleness of her character. There’s something wrong somewhere. I’ve prayed for her myself ; the ‘Brazen Vessel’ has asked for prayers on her behalf ; I have written three special letters to Donald MacTonans. But it seems all in vain, and I feel weak and downcast when I ought to be very strong.”

Miss Lindsay put on her bonnet and shawl, and for the first time since Foster’s attack, she prepared to leave the house. She gave strict injunctions to Betsey Brown, on her honour, not to leave Foster’s room during her absence.

“No more shilly-shally,” said Miss Lindsay, addressing her spiritual antagonist as

she left the house, "no more letter-writing; I am going straight off to Paternoster Row, and what's more, I mean to see the editor of the 'Brazen Vessel' face to face."

If Miss Lindsay had been accused of believing in the Grand Lama, or the Pope of Rome, or the Patriarch of Constantinople, she would have been indignant at such an imputation of superstition, or, indeed, if she had been accused of believing in any order of priesthood, Anglican or otherwise—but, nevertheless, whether in spiritual or earthly affairs, we do generally believe in some earthly power or medium, and Miss Lindsay's faith was centered in the editor of the "Brazen Vessel." When you pass down Fleet Street you cannot see with the bodily eye those countless fibres of influence, which start like innumerable telegraph wires from the large newspaper offices, bearing to the length and breadth of England the pulsations of a human brain throbbing with thought, it may be, in a little gaslit room; and far away beyond England spread those

fibres of influence to the utmost ends of the earth. This is marvel enough to merely secular minds, but to the mind of Miss Lindsay, the fibres of the "Brazen Vessel" were not only horizontal but perpendicular. They rose mysteriously from earth to heaven, and they returned to earth modifying earthly things—and insensibly and involuntarily in Miss Lindsay's mind, the editor of the "Brazen Vessel" seemed to be a being, potent with a spiritual potency, beyond all vaunted potentates of the spiritual world.

Miss Lindsay left the train at Cannon Street Station; through divers streets of narrow perplexity, she emerged into St. Paul's Churchyard. There stood St. Paul's Cathedral—grand with its façade, grander in that, if less great, than St. Peter's. "Priestcraft," muttered Miss Lindsay, scornfully, for she had long ceased to believe in its efficacy, and she hurried on to Paternoster Row in quest of the office of the "Brazen Vessel." She discovered it

with some difficulty, thanks in great measure to the help of a smudgy boy of inkstained aspect.

“Are you the lady as the guvner expects, ma’am? Up three pair, please.” The boy acted as pilot. They were narrow, worn deal stairs, littered with scraps of paper and dust but—the Scala Santa at Rome, is not more sacred to the faithful pilgrim, than were those stairs to Miss Lindsay. A feeling of deep awe crept upon her as she gathered up her petticoats for the ascent. At length she was to behold the mysterious being who had been gifted with spiritual anticipation of her approach; the right landing was reached at last; a door, the white paint of which was grimed by age, and the finger-marks of many dirty hands, was the only material obstacle between her beating heart and the sanctum of the “Brazen Vessel.”

The boy flung open the door! the room was empty. “Guvnor’s gone out for his chop—back in five minutes—safe.”

“I’ll wait,” said Miss Lindsay, speaking

with bated breath, and the boy retired to a small adjoining apartment, where he busied himself with certain occupations connected with a large paste-pot. Miss Lindsay was glad for awhile to be alone—it all seemed so mysteriously wonderful, awful beyond the awe of cathedral aisles and fretted roofs,—the little room in which she sat (and a dusty dirty little room, her eyes quickly discovered) was verily the source of a mighty power of prayer, held in the grasp of one human being—that story of St. Peter and the keys, forsooth—many a time had she laughed to scorn that assumption of priestly arrogance—and yet in the hands of this editor who had stepped out to get his chop, lay the awful power of accepting or refusing a paragraph of special prayer, upon which haply, might hang the salvation or damnation of human beings. She gazed with increased awe round the room; the outer husk of things spiritual was of no import in her eyes; the cheap, torn, dirty papering—the litter of dusty manuscripts, the old

dirty carpet trodden into holes—these things did not jar upon her feelings of deep reverence,—she looked for the inward and not the outward; the spiritual substance, and not the earthly shadow. At last her eyes chanced to fall upon divers placards. “Matter; A Journal of Mental Progress and Psychological Research.” What on earth could be the meaning of those placards?

A copy of that publication lay on the table close to where she sat; she took it up and read a few lines—

“Boy,” she cried, in agitated voice, “What’s this?”

“What the guvnor edits,” replied the boy, in the midst of his pastings.

“I came to see the editor of the ‘Brazen Vessel.’”

“All right, marm, guvnor edits both.”

“What, ‘Matter’ and the ‘Brazen Vessel?’” exclaimed Miss Lindsay, in awe-stricken voice.

“Yes, marm, both!”

“Beast!” exclaimed Miss Lindsay. And

before the astonished and terrified boy could regain his self-possession, Miss Lindsay dashed out of the room, and down the deal stairs into the street. “Oh, you scoundrel! No wonder the ‘Brazen Vessel’ could not help me. This is too terrible; the clear waters are turned to mud—that mighty power of help is lost, and the channels of grace are choked by infidelity.”

Crushed in body and soul, Miss Lindsay called a cab, and drove back to Dulwich. A letter awaited her—the Glasgow postmark—there was good augury in that. She tore open the envelope and quickly scanned the contents. It was in the handwriting of Mrs. Donald MacTonans.

“Come and help us. Poor Donald!—he says you alone can save him from the snares of the evil one. I can keep the dreadful secret no longer. It all comes of those long Sabbath afternoons, shut up in the house, poor dear, with the blinds drawn down; and then just that whiskey-toddy—a wee drop—and that’s how it began. But

he preaches and prays just as beautifully as ever——”

“Oh, good Lord,” cried Miss Lindsay in despair, “all help has failed me; don’t leave me to fight this awful battle alone.” She fell on her knees and prayed fervently, and the tears fell from her eyes, and her forehead was wet with perspiration. “Oh, Lord, don’t let that scoundrel conquer me now; don’t let him tear that precious jewel from Margaret’s hands—my darling, my true, noble girl.”

But there was no light of hope in her soul, and she wept bitterly, and groaned with the deep anguish of her loving heart. At length, all of a moment, she started to her feet, her face suddenly became radiant with faith and triumph.

“Oh, you scoundrel! the Lord has given us the victory. I tell you, His hand-maiden is saved! This is the Lord’s doing, and it is very wonderful. You’ll never guess our path to victory, because you only know the mean and contemptible ways of human

nature. The Lord will save her through the greatness and nobleness of her heart and soul."

Miss Lindsay descended to the drawing-room. As she approached, she heard loud voices, Mrs. Corley's voice and Mabel's. She entered the room. Mr. and Mrs. Corley were engaged in an excited conversation with Mabel. Miss Lindsay sat down in a chair, assuming her usual rigid attitude.

"Well, ma'am," said Mrs. Corley, turning abruptly to her, and speaking with a flushed face, "it's a good thing you have come, but I doubt whether you will remain long. Mrs. Vaughan has dared to throw off the mask at last. We came to expostulate with her upon Mr. Foster's remaining here in my late brother's house—a matter of scandal and shame to us and the whole neighbourhood—and Mrs. Vaughan has the fearful effrontery to tell us to our faces that she means this man to remain here with her to their lives' end—his mistress, and not his wife."

Miss Lindsay sat rigidly still, staring straight before her into vacant space.

“Did you hear what I’ve said, ma’am?” asked Mrs. Corley, becoming exasperated by Miss Lindsay’s manner.

“I heard,” answered Miss Lindsay.

“Then I presume, ma’am,” continued Mrs. Corley almost breathless with excitement, “that a proper regard for your own character and reputation, will cause you to leave this house of open shame forthwith.”

Miss Lindsay vouchsafed no reply.

“You, a woman of piety—of religion; a distributor of tracts; a reader at mothers’ meetings; a worker at Dorcas societies”—Mrs. Corley revelled in her triumph over Miss Lindsay—“and you remain here and abet this woman in her course of sin and shame! Come, Corley, I will not, as a Christian wife and mother, endure these insults any longer.”

“One word before you do go,” exclaimed Miss Lindsay, “and don’t forget it. If I were on my oath in a court of justice, and

if Betsey Brown were on her oath, we two should swear that one or the other of us has never left Mr. Foster's room ever since he was seized with illness in this house. I repeat, when you tell your cruel story, which you will be only too glad to tell, out of pure malice, don't forget to tell that bit of truth along with it."

"Anything more?" inquired Mrs. Corley, almost breathless with indignation.

"Yes, this tract, 'London Cream, or Hope for the Best,'" and Miss Lindsay rose from her chair, and with her peculiar knack forced the tract into Mrs. Corley's unwilling hand; she then immediately resumed her seat and gazed into vacancy.

"Come, Corley, this is no place for your wedded wife," and Mrs. Corley flung herself with indignation out of the room, followed by her husband.

There was silence for a while. At length Mabel spoke in a firm, determined voice.

"Mrs. Corley's account of what I said to her was quite true, and what she said to

you was quite true also—you must leave me; your character will be lost if you remain here. The whole world will turn away; you must leave me. I insist upon it.”

Again there was a long pause, and at last Miss Lindsay turned to Mabel and addressed her, gazing full in her face.

“Do you think if the whole world—if all the good people, and all the respectable people, and all the religious people stood howling at me, with the devil and all his angels behind them, it would make one iota of difference in my conduct? This world of time, big as it is, is a very small thing in my eyes, and it will quickly pass away, with its falseness and its lies. Leave you? That means defeat! Did any of my family ever turn their backs on the enemy, on fire, and sword, and death? My blessed ones fought their fight in India—my grandfather, my dear father, my Uncle Harry, and my darling Bob; shall I play the coward here in England, and then dare

to meet them, as I shall meet them, in that world which never ends? Leave you here in the very heat of the fight? What answer shall I make to my Lord when He asks me: 'Where is she, Margaret?' Shall I answer, 'I don't know, good Lord; the good people left her, and the respectable people, and the religious people, and then I left her.' And my Lord would say: 'But I never told you to leave her, Margaret. I told you to stand by her side, and fight for her through a great and fierce battle;' and then my Lord would look on me as he looked on poor shivering Peter that awful night at the fireside. I tell you for all the joy of Heaven or the pain of Hell, I would not behold that look on my Lord's face—that look of infinite pity, mingled with sorrowful contempt."

"So remember, Mabel, I shall never leave you; be it for sin or shame, I shall stand at your side and fight for you, and maybe, by the Lord's mercy, I shall save you in the end. Come what may, you will

always be my darling, my dear girl; when you want help, my arms will be folded round your neck, and my kiss will be upon your lips, and in my little home you will ever be a welcome guest. You understand me; you know you can trust Margaret Lindsay's word."

"But I've told those cruel people," faltered Mabel! "they know it now."

"You have a daring nature, Mabel, a grand defiant nature. You could meet shame face to face in talking to them—I knew you could do that; but I defy you to do this," Miss Lindsay rose from her chair, and her voice rang out with clear fervent utterance: "I defy you to go to the man you love, to the man who reverences you, and worships you, and regards you as his bright peculiar star of womanhood—his great and precious gift from the hand of God—I defy you to say to him, I will be your mistress, Frank; take me, not in honour, but in degradation and shame; no longer a woman to honour

and revere—the grand thoughts, and the noble and holy thoughts shattered for ever—a woman who has fallen, and you also must fall to be worthy of her degradation. Aye, Mabel, you could endure the contempt of the whole world—but I say, I defy you to endure the contempt of the man you love, and honour, and revere; every kiss a seal of sin and shame, an intolerable agony.” Miss Lindsay spoke these final words, standing erect with her head upraised, and a radiance, almost more than human, filled her countenance. When she looked down, Mabel lay sobbing at her feet.

And then Miss Lindsay bent to the ground, and falling on her knees raised Mabel in her arms, and kissed her.

“My darling, my daughter—my *God*-daughter in the right of this terrible baptism. Let us bless Him for this great deliverance, and above all things,” she whispered gently in Mabel’s ear, “when you remember the pain of this dark hour,

recollect that if this gift of love, which He has given you, has been a source of sorrow, and tribulation, and sore perplexity, its very greatness and nobleness have been the means of your salvation, saving both you and him from sin and shame, and making you both honourable and true and noble in His sight, and also in the sight of men."

CHAPTER XVI.

SAINTSHIP—SMALL 8VO., CLOTH, GILT EDGES.

MABEL returned to Torquay after an absence in all of little more than a fortnight from the day of the discovery of the new will.

“I am so glad you were able to return to-day, I thought my last letter would bring you back,” exclaimed Mrs. Smith, as she eagerly met her daughter in the hall. “Poor Mary has been much weaker, and one day quite alarmed us; she pined so to see you. I hope all that dreadful law business in London is settled at last.”

“Everything is settled, mother,” answered Mabel; “I have nothing to do now except to help you to nurse and comfort Mary.”

The pale face of the invalid lighted up as soon as Mabel entered her room.

“Darling, precious Mabel,” she exclaimed gleefully, though in a very weak voice, “so you have come back to us again.” Mabel kissed her sister and burst into tears.

“Don’t grieve for me, dear,” said Mary earnestly; “Mother frets herself, and thinks I am worse than I really am, but I shall soon be better, now that you have come back. I hope those carnal things won’t trouble you any more.”

“Everything is in Mr. Barton’s hands,” answered Mabel.

“I trust that Mrs. Corley and the rest were kind to you,” continued Mary; “poor dear, I dare say you have been dreadfully worried, but you will be quiet and happy with us now, won’t you darling?”

“Oh yes,” responded Mabel, “I shall try to be very happy.”

“Be sure I shall pray very earnestly that the true happiness and the true peace, may be vouchsafed to you abundantly.”

“Yes, yes, Mary,” exclaimed Mabel in words of heartfelt emphasis, “pray for that—pray for that!”

“At the same time,” continued Mary, and although she was very weak, she felt it was incumbent upon her to make the effort, “when we ask for fresh blessings, we must not forget to be thankful for the many blessings we possess. I have a poor weak suffering body, and yet I do not repine. I have long since been mercifully enabled to discover its deep blessing; but you, dear Mabel, with your good health and strength, you can never tell the temptations and trials which beset me, until I was permitted to convert those trials into blessings. Your spiritual path has been wonderfully easy; I might have doubted, I might have rebelled, but I fought and conquered, by the Lord’s mercy. Heaven be thanked that you have been spared combats of this hard nature. I don’t speak in any boastful spirit—God forbid—I only allude to these things for your example; hitherto your trials have

been rather after the flesh than the spirit—that early love-folly, for instance; thousands of foolish boys and girls have gone through the same thing. But that is all past and gone, thank Heaven. Oh, Mabel, the trials of the spirit are the hard things to bear, and you have been spared all that—just alter the pillow a little, dear. Your arm is so firm and strong, Mabel, it is such a comfort to me. I can see by your face that you have been a great deal worried, darling—but these wordly matters are nothing in comparison with heavenly trials.”

Mr. and Mrs. Smith were both in the room, and their eyes were filled with tears, as they listened to Mary's earnest words, and Mary with her pale suffering face looked like a saint in some modern picture, noteworthy for sweet popular sentiment, rather than technical power; but they none of them knew that Mabel, who lay weeping at the foot of her sister's bed, had fought a great fight and won a great victory, in the

light of which the spiritual triumphs of Mary paled away into insignificance—that her self-sacrifice was the source of all the material blessings and comforts that they enjoyed. Mr. Simeon was of course equally ignorant of the fact that the frequent dinners of inward comfort, and the nice hot suppers, and the well-matured old bottled port, and the genuine old Irish whiskey, were all owing to the supreme devotedness of a woman, who, in his eyes, was still unfortunately, notwithstanding many estimable Christian qualities, in a state of unregeneration. Mabel never opened her lips on the subject of her trial; in the first place, it would only have been an occasion of painful sorrow to Mary in her weak state, and secondly, though they loved her dearly, very dearly be it said—she knew that they would be unable to afford her any sympathy or comfort; that the story of her love would only be a wonder, or at most a perplexing worry to them all.

So Mabel lived on with her sacred grief;

but if there was great tribulation, there was also a sense of triumph in her soul, the man she loved would ever regard her with reverence and honour ; and although there were silent hours of bitter agony, and deep longings for love and sympathy, still she rose up the greater for these hours of depression, and Mary marvelled at her devoted care and overflowing affection, and others too, suffering members of Mr. Simeon's flock, experienced the blessing of Mabel's devotion and self-denial.

“ Dear Mabel,” Mary would sometimes say in gentle half-chiding voice, and with tears in her eyes, “ you think so much about others, I want you to think a little more about yourself and your own soul. ‘ If a man gain the whole world and lose his own soul.’ Think of those words, dearest, and then examine yourself carefully, as to whether you are not forgetting your own soul, in thinking so much about others. Your *own* salvation should be your chief thought and care. Thank Heaven, I was

mercifully led years ago to the knowledge of this blessed truth, and it has been an exceeding comfort to me in all ways, carnal and spiritual. Oh, Mabel, it is your own cross you must try to bear.”

Mr. Simeon thoroughly endorsed all Mary's sayings on this subject, and carefully noted them down in his memorandum book; he had in fact made considerable progress with Mary's biography. Mary lingered on, a hopeless invalid, for some three years, but without great pain; she was very resigned and happy, and she looked forward eagerly for release from all earthly weariness and toil. “I trust my poor sinful wicked life may not have been in vain,” she would sometimes say; “I trust that my trials and temptations may be a warning and example to many.” And lying in Mabel's arms, she would bless her for all her love and unwearied attention, and she would very frequently, although the effort was almost too much for her, pray for Mabel, that at last she might be converted,

and saved with the remnant of the true Israel.

As the hour of death drew nigh, all her thoughts seemed centred upon this one idea of Mabel's salvation. At the last hour they were gathered at her bedside, her parents and Mr. Simeon. Mabel raised the dying girl in her arms; they listened eagerly for some sweet consoling utterance as to her faith, her sure hope of salvation; in their deep anxiety, they questioned her about her *own* faith, her *own* soul; they asked her for some sign of her belief. But her ears were dull, and in the dying weakness of her brain, theology had lost its force and meaning, and her heart, in that supreme hour, was absorbed by one thought, love for the sister whose love for her, though she knew it not, had been the great love of self-sacrifice; and when, in painful anxiety, they pressed her with their questions, "did she believe?" "had she really a saving faith?" she murmured very faintly, "Mabel, darling Mabel. Oh Lord, save my precious Mabel,"

and her head sank back gently, and she died in Mabel's arms.

Mr. Simeon wrote the story of Mary's life in a very sweet and touching manner, his quotations from Scripture were very aptly chosen, but her last words troubled him greatly. He had anxiously looked for some dying assurance of her faith, but most unfortunately, notwithstanding her religious life, she had in the end only given evidence of a loving heart. Nevertheless he elected to stand by the truth, and merely add a few paragraphs by way of explanation and apology. Mr. Hard, however, absolutely demurred to this termination of the narrative.

"It's the real fact," protested Mr. Simeon, with tears in his eyes.

"Bless the man," exclaimed Mr. Hard with peevish irritation,—“who the deuce wants facts? We want books that will pay; I tell you, we must have a dying assurance of faith, or the book isn't worth

publishing. Don't bother yourself; I know what's what; leave it to me." And Mr. Hard with great deftness placed the required profession in the mouth of the dying girl. The book was an undoubted success—and the greatest stress was laid by the religious reviewers upon the dying words of Mary as recorded in the book; those words, they declared, were manifestly seals of edification. When Mr. Hard met Mr. Simeon shortly after publication upon the question of a second edition, he had his triumph. "Didn't I tell you that the book wouldn't have been worth twopence, if the death scene had stood as you wrote it? I've made that book into a small fortune; it's a sure card with middle-class Christians of limited means and subjective faith."

"Still it was the truth," said Mr. Simeon meekly and also regretfully.

"Bless the man. Here's your cheque," exclaimed Mr. Hard briskly. "Deuce a bit! don't that content you?"

Nevertheless Mr. Simeon thought (he did not venture to say so) that the truth would have been best, of course with clear explanations and a judicious apology addressed to the reader.

CONCLUSION.

MISS LINDSAY FIRES A PARTING SHOT.

SOME six years had come and passed, since the day that Mabel parted from Frank Foster, when one day in mid-autumn a letter arrived in Glasgow addressed to Miss Lindsay; it bore a Swiss post-mark. Miss Lindsay eagerly tore open the envelope. The letter was from Mabel written from the Eggishorn Hotel. "You darling, we are just married; until we were really married, I would not write to you. This is how it came about. That railway under Piccadilly had shaken the foundations of St. Ronald's, a large sum of money was required for underpinning. Mr. Barton pressed his point, and they

have given an annuity for the joint lives of my father and mother. I wrote to Frank to say I could marry him. Oh, you darling, we are so happy, Frank is making fair though slow progress in his profession, he works so hard, dear boy. That cruel will took away every penny I derived in any way from the property, but if need be, I can return for awhile to my old teaching, and in any event we have both resolved never to touch one penny of that man's property; but oh, we are so happy; we could not resist the extravagance of this little tour. Such a scene before my eyes, it seems as if one can see more of the wonderful ways of the Almighty in this mountain-land than in England. We sit together and gaze upon the glorious sunsets, and when we watch the crimson flush upon the mountain tops dying into the cold dead desolation of twilight, I remember with sadness the bright hopes that died away in despair; and then I cling to him in an agony of apprehension, till I call to mind

that this bright crimson, which crept up the mountain sides and died on the topmost peaks, will again light those peaks, and spread downwards like a rich mantle, until it dies away in the bright light of the perfect day."

Miss Lindsay's answer was written from Glasgow, now her permanent home; it was full of exultation and large love.

"Your letter has filled my heart with joy and brightness and faith; help of that kind is very precious. He and I are hard at it; he gives me no peace; he fights me with that toddy, and cant, and hollow religious profession, and dirt, and squalor; if it were not for the toddy and the cant, I think I should hold my own better. I was just in time to save poor Donald; I made him take the pledge. He preaches and prays just as well as ever, some people say; but I've a quick ear, and I don't catch the ring of the man in the big words; but still he's saved, though I always dread those Sabbath afternoons, and those dreadful blinds with cant

behind them. Alas, I don't always win the victory—he often beats me with his old dodge of hollow religious profession—and sometimes I feel very downhearted and weary; and I can't get about as quickly as I used, owing to the rheumatism, and that worries me a great deal. Sometimes I find myself asking, 'Oh, Lord, how much longer, for I'm very tired, and he's never weary of doing mischief?' And then just when I am at my worst, the Lord is very gracious, and sends me great comfort. He knows I'm only a plain matter-of-fact woman; that I should not understand white raiment, and wings, and golden crowns, so in His great mercy He sends Bob to help me in a sort of vision. Oh, but so real, just as Bob used to be in the old school days at Edinburgh, his coat torn, and his face smudged all over with dust and blood, but his voice always bright and cheery, 'That's your sort, old girl'—it was sometimes 'old girl,' and sometimes 'little Madge'—'straight out from the shoulder; drop it into 'em; never

say die.' And when I see that blessed vision, I always wake up refreshed with a good stout heart, and that scoundrel knows it. But, nevertheless, I should like to meet him face to face, for it's poor work always fighting in the dark, and one has to hit out all round, and there's no end to his dodging. But I know I never shall see him, till he and I meet before the Great White Throne, and then I shall stand at Bob's side and behold him grovelling at our feet. And I shall say to my Lord, 'I was only a poor weak woman, and he was a great prince, but in Thy strength, Oh, Lord, I was very strong, and in the mighty power of Thy love, many a time have I conquered him; and against his lies, and the lies he taught the world, and against cant, and hypocrisy, and soft false words, and lying phrases, I stood face foremost—and, as my godfather and godmothers vowed for me in my baptism (my godfather lost an arm at Trafalgar; he was a stout Christian to the backbone, though he swore to the last,

as sailors will); I fought that scoundrel to my life's end—under Christ's banner, against sin, the world, and the *devil*. Amen."

II.

ENNOBLED BY LOVE.

(VITTORIA CONTARINI.)

This story is adapted from a play of the same title. In order to secure the dramatic rights of the author, the play, prior to the publication of the story in the Temple Bar Magazine, was published by Messrs. Richard Bentley and Son, New Burlington Street, W.

VITTORIA CONTARINI;

OR,

LOVE THE TRAITOR.



PROLOGUE.

THE MANAGER'S SANCTUM.

“WE must do it cheap this time. I don't want a lot of carpenter's work, and a heavy bill for scenery—none of your speculative outlays, big ‘sets’ and an army of ‘supers;’ just try to eke out some of the old canvas with a new idea or two. What did I say? New ideas? Deuce a bit—new ideas and a stall audience, that won't pay!

mean old ideas touched up with fresh varnish—that's the only safe thing in the

way of novelty—a play full of new ideas would be bankruptcy for your humble servant. We've been pretty well the round of every sort of play—opera, farce, opera bouffe, and burlesque; so we'll just try back on the romantic by way of a change. To start with, I've got a thoroughly good moon, works on a new principle, sure burner, and warranted not to wobble; there's a new fleecy hosiery sky—flakes of cotton wool—it's a patent!—and a lunar rainbow, only that part of the machine comes expensive on account of chemicals, so leave out the rainbow.

“Come—a good moon is half a plot any day—just take a note of the scenery and properties as I go on. Number one, ‘Moon;’ I said ‘romantic’—well, of course that means Italy. I picked up a cheap lot of rubbishy imitation sixteenth-century Italian chairs in Wardour Street—deuced uncomfortable they are, too—seats and backs all wood; we'll whip on a little copper leaf and a dash or two of varnish—bless you, it will stamp the scene with antiquarian

research, and that's everything nowadays. It shows culture, and a knowledge of South Kensington, in the manager, and the critics like it because it enables them to show culture in themselves, and gives them an extra paragraph for their critiques. Write down six antique chairs—if you want more you must use the old stock lot, white and gold with emerald green satin.

“Anachronisms, hey? I can't help that—it's an author's business to dodge anachronisms—I can give you an old carved shrine with a little swing brass lamp, all complete, and a nice rosewood ‘prie-dieu’ chair, covered with modern ecclesiastical needlework; it's been a good deal used, and got rather creaky, but the glue pot will settle that. Then there's a splendid bit of tapestry—I picked it up in Paris—the worship of the golden calf—you might get some sparkling allusions out of that subject—modern mammon-worship, you know. I forgot, though—this is a romantic play—we must keep satire for comedy.

“Now for our scene; let me consider—I

don't think we've anything in stock that could be vamped up. We have settled upon Italy—haven't we? There's a good Palazzo interior they've been using somewhere in the provinces, I won't mention where, till the people won't stand it any longer—do for Rome or Naples, or what you like—it's going cheap—we will have that. Rather old, you say? Confound you authors, always wanting new scenes; people don't always live in new houses, do they? Stick to nature, can't you? All art ought to be founded on nature. By the way, take care to study the scene before you begin to write the play. I declare to you, as a solemn fact, I once had an author who wrote his play before seeing his scene—confound it, sir—we had had all our rehearsals, and when the scene arrived in the theatre at the last moment, on the very evening of the performance, we were never able to use the real door—a splendid big door it was, too; we had to keep it permanently shut, and cut a false door through the papering. I

didn't give that author a second commission, I can tell you.

“ Talking of false doors, that reminds me ; take care you get a sliding panel into your plot ; sliding panels have been too much neglected of late. I have an unbounded faith in sliding panels. I've seen an audience, utterly incapable of understanding the simplest plot, entirely absorbed by a sliding panel ; in fact, they never looked at the actors at all ; their eyes were always fixed on the panel, and that panel was the making of the play.

“ Come, don't grumble at the scene. I'm going to give you a splendid 'back cloth ;' for the matter of that, two—the same subject, daylight and moonlight—they were painted for a diorama ; it's a view of Santa Maria della something—it's got a big dome, don't you know ? I'll swear I've never been at an exhibition in all my life, oil or water, but I've seen a picture of that Santa something—persons of culture know it as well as they know St. Martin's Church, and

those are the people who frequent my theatre."

"You're quite right, the church is at Venice. Well, then, that fixes Venice for our locality. Never been to Venice! What's that matter? You can get it all out of Murray and Baedeker, can't you? Besides, a man always writes with greater freedom about a subject of which he's entirely ignorant; bless you, that's how the best critiques are written. Man alive, never make difficulties if you want to be a dramatic author. Here's our scene, then. 'Magnificent but dilapidated chamber in the Palazzo something, with a distant view of the church of Santa something;' sounds well for a bill, don't it? Egad, my boy, Venice, and a patent moon! I've half written the play for you!

"What's that? Venice worked out! Pooh, nothing's worked out if you've got brains to work in; it's what you put into a subject, not what you get out of it. Come, I think we've settled everything; let's have

a glass of sherry. The company, hey? I leave you to fit the company; that's your business, not mine. All I know is, if you don't fit 'em as tight as wax, your play won't come to the boards. Gad, sir, when it comes to the rub, the manager daren't open his mouth if he's got a first-rate company. Leading lady? You'd better ask her what sort of character she would like; it's all one to me, provided it's a good one for the public; as to our leading gentleman, I say ditto. Bless you, give 'em what they like, and plenty of it; it's the easiest method of writing a play, both for author and manager.

“One caution, though: don't make the dresses expensive; leading ladies ruin managers in dresses whenever they get a chance—I believe they do it out of spite—chintz and muslin, if you can. Wouldn't do for Venice, hey?—rich brocaded silks! Egad, if it wasn't for those views of Santa something, which I bought cheap, I'd throw Venice over, that I would!

“Do I object to history? Well, I don’t hold to it as a rule; educated people don’t care for history; but, mind you, anything does, if you’ve got a strong plot—people only care to think about what amuses them, and the history goes for nothing. That reminds me, if you treat Venice, you must have a conspiracy—people always look for a conspiracy in Venice—they wouldn’t be content without one; it’s the regular Venetian thing, just like that crinkly glass.

“You don’t think there was a conspiracy during the period you propose treating? Confound it, sir, you must make a conspiracy! It’s no use arguing; a conspiracy I mean to have, and that’s flat! Don’t talk to me about historical accuracy—it’s the recognized canon of dramatic composition, that you are at liberty to twist history round your fingers. All the best critics say so, and they must know. I assert that a dramatic author is no more bound to stick to the recognized lines of history, than a landscape painter is bound to paint a view with

topographical accuracy. History is the slave of fiction, and the grovelling slave of the drama.

“What do I mean by ‘romantic’? Hang it all, I thought everyone understood the meaning of that word! Why, it’s—let me see—why, it’s something with lots of intense interest, but not too strong in the mouth. Something which titillates the sensibilities, but don’t harrow them. Look you, our people stroll into the stalls after a thoroughly good dinner; they require the excitement of just so much mental activity as may promote and assist digestion; they don’t want all the blood forced to the head by tragic intensity—dyspepsia, you know. There, that’s the meaning of the word ‘romantic’! Now go and do it, there’s a good fellow, and as quick as you can, for we are deuced hard up for novelty.

“Just one caution about the heroine. For Heaven’s sake, none of your psychology, and mental analysis, and stuff o’ nonsense—that sort of thing is only fit for a

French audience—you must stick to a good, plain-sailing, flesh and blood kind of heroine, the style of girl other girls would like to be; awfully good, of course, and take care to pile on lots of mild agonies—the more, the better. That's your sort of heroine, if you want a play to pay. As for your hero, make him deuced bad to begin with—interesting, of course—bad and interesting—that's a sure card! Women are always fascinated by bad and interesting men. And then, at the end, make him good through the influence of the heroine. Women like that notion so much; it ministers so pleasantly to their sweet pride and vanity, bless 'em. A reformed rake, don't you know; something in the Charles Surface style.

“Not particularly original, do you say? Of course it isn't; I don't require you to tell me that. Confound it, sir, didn't I tell you at first starting that I entirely decline being ruined by an original play? If you insist upon being original, you may look out for another manager. Come, we've had

talk enough to understand one another, and there's a dozen people waiting for me. Help yourself to that sherry, and I'll run through your notes meantime.

“Number one, ‘A patent moon.’ I shall have to get a new man, that's clear; old Jones isn't steady enough. Number two, ‘Six Venetian chairs’—culture! just a light coat of varnish. Number three, ‘Shrine, with lamp to ditto’—relacquered, I think. Number four, ‘Prie-dieu chair’—glue! Number five, ‘Old tapestry.’ We'll hang the golden calf before the panel, not that the one is relevant to the other, but it will catch the eye better there than anywhere else. Number six, ‘Sliding panel!’ If that works easy, the play's as good as made. Number seven, ‘Palazzo interior, Venice;’ we'll dodge it up a bit to look like one of Fortuny's pictures—splash and dash, you know. By the way, couldn't you manage to introduce one of those withered old lackeys of his, in a big faded livery?—an old livery wouldn't ruin me. I'll just add

‘lackey with livery out at elbows.’ You’ll be able to work in the lackey, never fear. Number eight, ‘Back cloth—Santa Maria della Salute.’ Gad, ‘Salute’ was the name, sure enough! By Jove, a first-rate moon, with real cotton wool clouds; you wouldn’t know ’em from nature when the limelight’s on, and Santa Maria della Salute! What a chance for an author! If you don’t mind passing that sherry, I’ll take a glass myself. You’re in luck’s way, my boy, if ever an author was. Number nine, ‘Conspiracy.’ Ah! about something or the other, I don’t care what, as long as we get a conspiracy. Number ten, ‘Heroine, milk and water, with mild agonies.’ No, hang it, you haven’t quite hit my meaning—fire and water, if you like; lots of passion. Number eleven, ‘Hero, bad, but capable of improvement.’ Good! set to work at once. One moment, though: have we chanced to miss any of the romantic stock business? Let’s be careful. Yes, by Jove, we’ve forgotten the monk—a monk we must have! Franciscan

monk, brown serge, don't you know?—white knotted girdle and beads complete; cowl, of course—he must use his cowl; the *raison d'être* of a monk is his cowl. Oh, you'll manage it; a monk's easy enough for any man with one spark of imagination.

“Well, good-bye. This day week to read the play! Too soon, hey? Why, bless the man, the play's as good as written. I've given you the plot and characters, it only wants the dialogue. I could knock it off myself, if I wasn't so worried by my leading people. A first-rate company, you know. Confound it, there's no contenting them any way. Bless you, don't bother about poetry and figures of speech; I'll warrant my public won't look for metaphors if you give 'em a monk, and a moon, and a sliding panel. Come, we'll say this day fortnight—sharp, mind. There's one thing: remember I'm only a manager, not an actor, so you won't be obliged to fit me with a character. It will make your writing all the easier. *Au revoir!*”

CHAPTER I.

THE HEROINE.

FAR away from London, as far as Venice; and still farther away from London life, as far as that life regards young ladyhood—in a word, far away from the life of Rotten Row, and Prince's, picnics, balls, and Ascot; far away from the assured and comfortable life of constitutional freedom and social security, to a life heroic, to the life of a young lady who potentially could have ridden, danced, flirted, and trifled with existence as thoroughly and as earnestly, as the brightest and lightest hearted girl of the London season, but who actually lived day by day amid anxious fears and

large absorbing hopes, with hourly chances of domiciliary visits by alien police agents, with every chance of a prison, and ruin, and exile, if not for herself, at least for those she loved,—aye, and a very reasonable chance of death as a climax—but still, I repeat, potentially the very same girl as the young lady of London fashion—for girls are girls all the world over, whether the blood flows lazily in the easy levels of existence, or boils and dashes with the violent palpitations of hope and fear—a stagnant stream of the lowlands, or the bright sparkling highland torrent.

Not very far down the stream of time to the days in which our heroine lived. The year of her birth was the year in which the present Pope, Cardinal Mastai Ferretti, ascended the chair of St. Peter with the promise of liberty and constitutional reform; and the heart of the mother who bore her, had beaten with the hope of Italian freedom and redemption. Her young ears had heard the popular acclamation with

which the Austrian had been driven from Venice, and Daniel Manin chosen Dictator of the new Republic, and the booming of the cannon of that siege which, after a heroic resistance, once more subjected Venice to the Austrian rule. During the siege, her mother died in giving birth to a son; and so it fell, that young as she was, she insensibly assumed the love and care of a mother to this young brother; and time, which in due course increased her ability, also added to the strength of her devotion.

With regard to social position, Vittoria Contarini, as her name denotes, was the daughter of a great patrician family. She dwelt in an old palazzo, whereof the glories of Sansovino had indeed been embellished by the hand of time; but with regard to things of less endurance than stone and marble, time had worn away the rich gilding, and faded the splendid hangings, and rubbed them threadbare. Stil it was a poverty of grandeur and not of mean-

ness—the poverty of nobles, and not of beggars.

Grand pictures had once adorned the walls of the Palazzo, but those pictures of the Venetian school, in which the colours must have been ground with essence of gold, had one by one been surrendered to picture-dealers, and connoisseurs with purses filled by commerce, and directors of foreign galleries; and so, in days of sore need, Titian and Paul Veronese had returned a hundredfold the liberality of their patrons. But the type of the golden-haired women of old Venetian art dwelt in our heroine. A splendid framing of flesh and blood; she might have sat to Bonifazio for those women of his *capo d'opera*, “the feast of the wicked rich man.”

Had she lived in England, she would in all probability have been educated by a loving mother for the purpose of eventual marriage. Her early life would have been passed in a well-regulated nursery; things on the whole being made very smooth and

pleasant—ponies, and carriage drives, and fresh wholesome country life; anon, the shadow of the school-room, with careful governesses and eminent professors. Church of England principles duly instilled, but at the same time duly diluted with prudent worldliness—earth first, with heaven *en attendant*. An early life passed in contact with people of worth, and trust, and honourable sentiment, and gentle culture; and as a result of all this pleasant experience, a conviction, growing into an ambition, that it would be very advantageous to repeat in her own person the life of her own mother; to be loved some day by some pleasant young man of due rank and fortune; to live pleasantly and lovingly all the days of her life. Marriage the crowning ambition, and leading thither by pleasant steps, the delight of a first season, presentation at Court, and the fifty bright things which glitter before the eyes of a well-born English girl on her entrance into womanhood.

But our heroine lived at Venice under Austrian rule; her nurse was a spy in Austrian pay, her governess was a spy in Austrian pay, the servants round her were all more or less spies, for her father was a man suspected by the authorities of the empire, and the authorities of the empire had a firm belief, that a ludicrously niggling inspection of household life in Venice would hold Venetia safe and sound for the Austrian crown. So our heroine was early schooled in caution and subtlety by her father, and she quickly learned the art of suppressing emotion and feeling.

The governess was a woman of accomplishment, and, scholastically, she taught her pupil faithfully—earning her wages honestly as well for tuition as for police duties. With regard to moral culture, and those branches of education which involve sentiment, she very justly suspected that her quiet, calm, self-contained pupil thoroughly despised her, and being a woman of good sense, she did not waste her own time and

that of her pupil on those subjects. Our heroine learned her lessons of that nature from her father, in a little room with thick walls and double doors.

History was not a quiet school lesson—a collection of useful dates, and a *précis* for a copybook—but a thing of passion and agony, and tears, and hope; and the girl's heart heaved, and the grand eyes filled with tears, or flashed with anger and indignation, as the story of Italy and the German, and Italy and the Pope, was spread out before her, and the story of that last siege, when her mother died, was poured into her ears by her father, who had himself fought the guns in that fort of Malghera which had for so many months shielded the life of Daniel Manin's republic; but she learned, nevertheless, to pass out of the double doors with a calm and self-possessed countenance, and she was perfectly prepared to receive a music-lesson from her governess, the spy.

So as a young girl, her hopes were not

social but political—not the pleasures of a first season, but the freedom of Venice; and that other hope of eventually loving some pleasant young man of due rank and fortune, and living pleasantly and lovingly all the days of her life—this hope was also denied to our heroine. Years previously the question of marriage had been definitely settled for her by her father—she was destined in due course to marry a man of noble family more than twice her own age. It was a destiny, the common destiny of Italian girls of her own rank, and she accepted it as the heiress of Belmont accepted the ordeal of the caskets; but it was not a subject of happiness. She respected and even admired her betrothed, but she did not love him. Her marriage would indeed have taken place some few years before the commencement of our story, but for the intervention of political obstacles. Her betrothed was a man persecuted by the authorities, leading a hunted life, with spies and police agents on his track, but doubling

upon them and outwitting them with the cunning of a fox. Count Grimani was the head in Venice of that secret national society, which Austria and domestic tyranny had begotten; a man of intellect and power; a man worthy of being a member of a great political assembly. It is difficult for us here in England to release the idea. To draw a picture of such things by analogy would be to draw a caricature. It is impossible to think seriously of certain eminent English citizens playing at hide-and-seek with Scotland Yard in false hair and unseemly costumes, instead of being members of the English Parliament; but such things *were* grim facts, and not jokes, a few short years ago in Italy.

The question of marriage not being a question of love between our heroine and her betrothed, she was perfectly free to differ from him in feeling and sentiment, there being no danger that the family compact would thereby be destroyed; and upon two points, as far as the nobility of her

character was concerned, it was fortunate that her antipathy created a difference of feeling. He hated the priests as siding with the enemies of Italian freedom; and, identifying their faith with their politics, he hated and despised both. But the heart of a woman cannot live wholly upon hatred. Our heroine loved her brother with devoted affection; but that was not enough. Her father's love was greater towards her brother, as being the last male descendant of his house, than towards herself. She wanted a large love and sympathy; she hated the priest as bitterly as her betrothed, but hatred was not consolation. She could discover no balm of comfort in pure materialism; but the idea of a divine woman, to whom she could pour forth her wants and prayers, was too blessed and comforting a thought for the lonely heart of a motherless girl to reject and despise; and seeming, as it did, that during her course of life she was never likely to meet with a full measure of love and sympathy, she clung with the greater

fervour to this source of consolation and support. Thus, through the heart, the priest well-nigh regained what as a politician he had lost. Nor did she forget that Arnold of Brescia, and Savonarola, and their own Father Sarpi, had been patriots as well as priests.

The other point wherein she ventured to differ from her betrothed was the doctrine of the dagger. It is true she scarcely dared to avow her difference. Despair has driven many a noble nature to accept the doctrine of tyrannicide as the last weapon of hopeless oppression, but Vittoria, with true instinct, held to a great idea of Venice one day winning freedom by open combat and untarnished victory. She prayed fervently in her enthusiastic girlish heart, that if men's fingers must press the trigger, she might at least bite the cartridge, and load the musket, and stand at the post of danger. She knew how to mould a cartridge—she had learned it from her brother; she could do it as deftly as she could mould a ciga-

rette for her father, or with cleanest of white hands play a valse of Chopin to her governess, who was justly proud of her pupil's brilliant execution.

Thus there were two hopes which in Vittoria's heart replaced the English girl's hope of the first season and marriage—the freedom of Venice, and knowing that, life permitting, marriage would be the result of that day's triumph; the hope that death might somehow or the other befall her in the combat. So, with her beauty veiled by the black mantilla, and shrinking with scornful disdain from the Austrian in the piazza, for those two things she prayed under the golden dome of St. Mark, with eyes raised to those figures of Christ and the Apostles, awful in the gaunt majesty of Byzantine art, but harmonizing in their sternness with the dark sadness of her prayers.

To one prayer it seemed at last that an answer was to be vouchsafed. The peace of Villafranca between the French and the Austrian emperors had been a cruel blow to

Venetian hope; but once more chances were astir—German was marshalled against German; Prussia had joined Italy against Austria, the army of Italy had crossed the Mincio; Garibaldi and his volunteers were up and doing among the northern mountains, and the national society of Venice was on the *qui vive* to second, if possible, by some popular rising, the efforts of Victor Emmanuel and of the Italian nation to free Venice and create an united Italy.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHALLENGE.

PIETRO was major domo in the Palazzo Contarini, and he was a good deal more than that; in fact, he performed in his own person all the offices which in an opulent and aristocratic household are performed by a large company of men-servants. In the better days many were the male attendants who ministered to the wants and splendour of the Contarini family—large the wages and perquisites, and large and splendid the men who enjoyed them. Pietro was old and wizened, and of shuffling gait; and old and tarnished and misfitting was the livery he wore. He was, in fact, wearing

out the old liveries in succession—he had worn out several, but there were liveries enough stowed away in old coffers to last Pietro to the end of his existence. The wages and perquisites he received from Count Contarini were next to nothing; but, nevertheless, he was cheerful, contented, and zealous. He loved the old family, did Pietro—at least he said he did—and by way of marking his emotion he used to rub a faded sleeve over his grey twinkling eyes, and the sleeve was ample enough to conceal the grin on his mouth; it was really a capital place, for the Austrian police paid him excellent wages. If the servant was contented, so also was the master. Count Contarini knew that a spy he *must* have in his house, and he obtained the service of a zealous, but not particularly acute, servant at merely nominal cost. It was easy enough to hoodwink Pietro; indeed, Count Contarini thought the Austrians had got by far the worst of the bargain, for so far as motive went, it was clearly against Pietro's interest

to lose an excellent place through divulging secrets, which would cause his master to be imprisoned, and the household to be broken up—besides, the thing was a system, and directly things become systems and shape themselves to our daily life, we insensibly accept them, just as, in truth, we accept many doubtful and indefensible arrangements in our own domestic establishments, large or small, here in England.

Nevertheless, even considered philosophically, edged tools do remain dangerous playthings, and there was a grand opportunity for Pietro to gain a lump sum which would save him from all further menial service, and by judicious investment render him comfortable to the end of his days. The Austrian authorities had offered ten thousand florins for the body of Count Grimani, dead or alive, and Pietro seemed to be the very man destined to win this reward. He believed, and indeed the Austrian police had warned him, that the Count was accustomed to pay secret visits to the Palazzo

Contarini—but when and how? He flattered himself that he knew every secret of the old walls, but there was clearly some means of hidden access to the grand saloon of the mansion which he had failed to discover. The chase was becoming fast and furious, and Pietro had received personal instructions from Baron Falkenberg, who was the chief of the Austrian police in Venice, to sound inch by inch the walls of the saloon. With long brush and duster, on pretence of thoroughly cleaning the decorations, did Pietro set to his task—he sang snatches of Italian national songs by way of deceiving his master in case he should be within earshot, and he interlarded his singing with low oaths of impatience and ejaculations of hope, as now and then, a hollow sound, in answer to his tapping, gave promise of success—but the hollow sound came chiefly from loose plaster decoration, and was merely delusive.

“If I could but find it, that fox’s hole, and then one fine day I should trap the fox,

and then ten thousand florins! Why, Pietro, with ten thousand florins you would be a gentleman at large, bless the saints! and not one soul the wiser for your day's work. Ten thousand florins! It must be mine sooner or later, for my trap is baited with the lady of his love, that proud signorina, my mistress Vittoria—not that she loves him, but she draws him here, as the steam and bubble of the cookshop draw me; we poor devils of men are the puppets of love or hunger.” Pietro's occupation was interrupted by the voice of Count Contarini outside the room.

“Open the door, Pietro;” the Count was endeavouring in vain to open the door.

“Plague upon it,” muttered Pietro; “that lock was mended yesterday.”

“Quick, Pietro, quick!” exclaimed the Count, with impatience.

“The old fool,” responded Pietro, in an undertone, “he's always fumbling with the locks.” Pietro went to the door and, turn-

ing the handle with the greatest ease, admitted his master.

“That locksmith is a rascal, a fool, a blundering idiot!” exclaimed the Count, with affected anger as he entered.

“A thousand pardons, Signor! I can open it easily enough,” replied Pietro.

“Yes, from the inside,” rejoined the Count with emphasis; “it’s from the outside that it sticks—let it be mended, do you hear.”

“Certainly, Signor,” answered Pietro, submissively, and he examined the lock. “It’s not the lock,” thought Pietro, “it’s only an excuse for closing the door against me,” and then, by way of sustaining his patriotism, he began humming a national song.

“Curse that tongue of yours, Pietro; we shall have the Austrians down upon us in a minute.”

“A million pardons,” whined Pietro; “it’s so hard not to sing of freedom, with the love of poor Venice at the bottom of one’s heart.”

It was the Count's policy to assume the fidelity of Pietro.

"It will be harder singing in an Austrian dungeon, you fool. Now be off; you can't mend that lock by staring at it."

"He's a cunning dog, my master," muttered Pietro; "but I'm more cunning still," and with an obsequious bow he shuffled out of the room.

The Count hurried to the door and thrust a small wedge into the latch, and drawing over the door a hanging of thick antique tapestry, he gave three low stamps on the floor with his foot, a panel flew back in the very part of the wall which Pietro had been testing, and Count Grimani entered from a secret passage.

It was an anxious greeting on the part of Count Contarini. "Ah, Grimani, I always tremble when you set foot in this house—that cursed Pietro!"

"You don't value Pietro as you ought," answered Grimani calmly, and a sarcastic smile played for a moment on his thin

expressive lips. "Pietro is a fool, and therefore invaluable to us. He hasn't yet learnt that walls have ears. He literally whispered all his designs into my ear as I stood behind the panel; but, indeed, Pietro and myself are old friends, and just now we are both in Austrian pay. Falkenberg isn't the brightest of men, and as a last resource he's paying me excellent wages to catch myself."

"You run fearful risks," exclaimed Contarini.

"Audacity is safety," answered Grimani, quietly.

"Nay, but Cavour's motto, prudent audacity."

"No time to think of prudence," replied Grimani, and grasping Contarini's hand he addressed him in low but fervent words, and as he spoke his countenance, naturally calm and impassive, grew intensely animated, and his dark eyes flashed with emotion. "Oh, Contarini, the day that you and I have longed for through these

dark years of oppression and despair has dawned at last. Listen to the glorious hope. Austria is at her wit's end for men—every nerve is being strained to meet the army of Victor Emmanuel before Custozza—the garrison here in Venice is reduced to well-nigh a handful of their worst troops—Croats and such like scum—we are in secret communication with the Italian government—the fleet of Italy is cruising off Malamocco—Cialdini is advancing by forced marches on Rovigo.”

“Oh, my friend,” exclaimed Contarini with emotion, “Vittoria ought to hear these words of hope.”

“In good time, Contarini,” answered Grimani, in a tone of sarcasm. “Women have their value, but not as conspirators.”

“Vittoria is my daughter,” replied Contarini proudly, “and hatred of the Austrian runs in her blood.”

“Aye, the greater danger lest her feelings should betray us,” rejoined Grimani impassively. “In Venice, emotion itself is a

traitor—well, well, she shall know the truth later, but not now.” And then, with passionate utterance, he exclaimed, “At last we may dare to strike a blow for freedom; the secret society has commanded all true Venetian men to hold themselves in readiness—an *émeute* is impending! One struggle, and the flag of Italy waves over the Piazza of St. Mark.”

“An insurrection!” exclaimed Count Contarini with surprise, “but——”

“‘But!’” rejoined Grimani with vehemence—“but if we die, that flag waves over our dead bodies. Venice is free, and we are avenged!” Vittoria entered the chamber by a door leading from her own rooms. In an instant Grimani reverted to his usual impassive state. “Ah, my dearest,” he exclaimed, and whispering to Contarini not to reveal the imparted intelligence, he advanced to meet his betrothed.

“One kiss, Vittoria.”

“No, Count Grimani,” and she shrank from him, waving him back, “not now.”

“Why so cold?” he asked.

“Cold!” she replied, with a flush of indignation mantling her countenance; “my face burns with shame, and my lips—oh, vile thought.”

“Vittoria,” expostulated her father, “you have sworn to keep that outrage a secret.”

“From my brother Marco,” replied Vittoria; “not from this man, my affianced husband, the guardian of my honour. Count Grimani, a few words will tell the story of the shameful insult to which I have been exposed. I had gone to St. Mark’s last evening——”

“It was contrary to my wishes,” exclaimed Contarini bitterly.

“I know I was wrong,” she answered, in tones of deprecation, “but it was the anniversary of Daniel Manin’s death far away in Paris—it seemed so hard not to utter one prayer for the love of him who endured so much for Venice. I was returning with Marietta to the gondola,” she continued in trembling words; “we were suddenly sur-

rounded by a crowd of Austrian officers reeling from the café Quadri; one of these men seized me by the arm—tore aside my veil—I strove to free myself from his grasp”—she hesitated, words failed her for the moment in the very force of her indignation.

“I know the story,” said Count Grimani calmly.

“You know it?” exclaimed Vittoria with surprise.

“I know all things that occur in Venice,” he answered in the same impassive tone; “he kissed you.”

She clasped her hands over her face; she was ashamed to hear those hateful words spoken by his lips.

“Do you know this man’s name?” she asked, after a pause.

“I do; Maximilian von Stettenheim, Colonel of the Third Regiment of Croats.”

“You tell me this man’s name,” she replied, nettled by his apparent indifference; “can you tell me that the insult is avenged?”

“I cannot,” he answered quietly.

“You cannot, and you are my affianced husband,” she rejoined in a tone of sarcasm.

“But with a price upon my head,” he answered, wincing at her reproach.

“I know that,” she replied quickly. “But why so little moved by what concerns your honour as well as mine?”

“Not empty words which weaken resolution, Vittoria, but deeds when the hour comes. Do you think that freak of yours last evening cost me nothing?” he continued, in passionate utterance. “Though you knew it not, I was close at hand when that man laid his cursed hands on you—kissed your lips. I could have struck him down dead at my feet, but I had to stand like a thing of stone and behold the outrage, for I have sworn that fearful oath—‘before all things,’ aye, flesh and blood, ‘Venice.’ I should have been arrested, the head of the secret society captured—shot for the sake of a woman; I have sworn only to die for the freedom of Venice. But patience,

you shall be avenged in good time ; I dare not strike openly, but I will strike, and this Austrian dog shall bite the dust."

"I understand your meaning," replied Vittoria mournfully ; "the dagger ! No, Count Grimani ; better the insult remain unavenged, than that the name of Vittoria Contarini be linked with a new disgrace."

"Oh, woman, give me justice," he rejoined bitterly. "Have I a sword to use ? I was a soldier in '48 I received my baptism of fire from the Austrian batteries at Novara ; I received the cross of honour from the hands of Daniel Manin. Justice, I say ; what weapon have those cursed Austrians left me but the knife, the coward's tool ? I, a soldier of Italy, lie and skulk, a spy in the Austrian quarters. I accept the shame, Vittoria ; I endure it for the love of Venice."

"The love of Venice," she exclaimed with fervour. "Oh, save her from all stain of dishonour ! The day of her freedom will

come; let her be spotless in that day of triumph."

"Aye, you women with your pretty fancies," answered Grimani contemptuously. "The building will, indeed, be fair to look on; but there's rough work to be done first, and the hands of the workmen must needs be soiled with their work—first rubble, then the fair, white marble."

The voice of Pietro from the outside intervened in the discussion.

"Open the door, Signor! open the door!" The voice of Pietro effectually terminated the discussion, by forcing Count Grimani to retire by the sliding panel.

"Open the door yourself, you fool," exclaimed Count Contarini in an assumed tone of mockery; "you said the lock was all right."

"Open, Signor, pray open," reiterated Pietro.

Contarini, as soon as he was assured of the safety of Grimani, withdrew the wedge, and opened the door to Pietro. "You see,

it does stick on the outside," he remarked with emphasis, as the servant entered.

"Oh, Signor," exclaimed Pietro with some affectation of alarm, "there's something wrong; Count Platten of the third regiment of Croats waits below; here's his card."

"Count Platten!" exclaimed Contarini with alarm. "What's the meaning of this?"

"He desires to see you," answered Pietro; "merely a private visit, he told me to say."

"A private visit from an Austrian!" exclaimed the Count. "Impossible! It means some mischief or the other; but there's no help for it, show him up."

As soon as Pietro had withdrawn, Vittoria flew to her father with deepest anxiety. "You must not see this man," she exclaimed; "I will meet him—make some excuse for your absence—he cannot harm me, but perhaps they come to arrest you. Oh, do listen to my entreaties; there's the

panel passage, you'll be safe for the time ; if you love me, do as I wish ;" and, overcoming his reluctance, she forced her father to retire by the panel door. At that very moment her brother Marco entered the chamber by the door leading from her apartments. She flew to him, and addressed him in words incoherent with alarm. "Marco, dearest, do not come here now ; the Austrians are in the house ; back to my room, conceal yourself—I shall be quite safe ; back, I say, they won't dare to harm a woman—Count Platten comes."

"Count Platten," answered Marco, with deliberation ; "I expected the visit."

"You expected this man?" she exclaimed with surprise.

"Yes, sweet sister ; you must leave us ; we have business together."

Count Platten was announced by Pietro, and entered the room. He was a young man of somewhat ungainly aspect, his face white and puffy, but evidently an officer and a gentleman, and not a police agent.

He appeared to be greatly taken aback by being ushered into the presence of a lady, for he blushed deeply, bowed with the greatest ceremony to Marco, and stammered with nervousness, "Have I the honour of addressing Count Marco Contarini?"

"Your obedient servant," responded Marco, with a bow of equal ceremony.

Platten then bowed to Vittoria with the greatest politeness; she returned his bow with studied coldness.

"My sister, the Countess Vittoria Contarini,—Count Platten," said Marco; and turning to his sister, he said with significance, "This gentleman will pardon your absence, Vittoria."

"I pray you, madam," said Platten, with the utmost courtesy, "not to let my unwilling intrusion drive you away; one moment will suffice for my business with Count Marco." He then whispered in Marco's ear, "You of course understand the object of my visit. I wait on you to inquire the name of your second."

"Count Salvetti," answered Marco in a low tone.

Vittoria felt she ought to obey her brother's injunction to leave the room, but her steps dragged with a weight of lead as she strove to gain the door of her apartments. There was a terrible fascination in the whispered conversation of the two men, and although the words were inaudible, it held her spellbound on the threshold.

"Of course, no friendly intervention is possible," observed Platten.

Marco bowed in acquiescence.

"We propose to-morrow, at daybreak," continued Platten.

"Count Salvetti will arrange all the preliminaries," answered Marco. "I am now in his hands."

"There is no occasion for me to intrude upon you any longer," observed Platten. "I have the honour to wish you good morning." And with ceremonious bows on both sides, Marco opening the door with marked politeness, Platten left the room.

Vittoria guessed but too well the terrible purpose concealed beneath this formal courtesy. She flew to Marco's side, and clasped his hands — "A duel! Merciful Heaven! what does it mean?"

"It means, sweet sister," answered Marco sternly, "that I have avenged that insult."

"Marco!" she exclaimed, breaking from him in dismay.

"I laid my cane across the lips of that man, and drew blood."

"Rashness! madness!" she answered.

"Madness!—are you not my sister?"

"I meant to keep this insult a secret from you, from every one, except my father and Count Grimani. How did you learn it?"

"I learnt it," he answered, "in a brutal boast from those very lips which I have struck."

"The worst has come!" she exclaimed, in tones of despair. "Oh, Marco! it is too fearful to think you should have done all this for my sake—that you should risk your

life for my miserable wilfulness. Your life ! nay, my life, which is bound up in yours. Oh, Marco ! you are the being I love most on earth !—brother, more than brother !” She turned away from him. “ Oh, merciful Heaven !” she murmured in her anguish, “ to be the cause of his death !” for she knew full well that this Stettenheim was famed for his skill as a swordsman, and that her brother, a mere boy, must be helpless when matched against such an antagonist, and tears filled her eyes.

“ Vittoria,” he exclaimed reproachfully, “ you unnerve me with this weeping.”

“ I only care for your safety,” she answered. “ I can forgive that insult—for-give everything.”

“ I can never forgive the dishonour of our family,” he rejoined, sternly. “ My father, at least, need know nothing of this affair until it is over. I bind you to silence.”

“ Alas, Marco ! our father knows of this visit of Count Platten. He is even now

concealed in the secret passage with Count Grimani. I dare not delay; I must let them know that the Austrian has gone." She replaced the wedge in the latch, and gave the accustomed signal. Her father and Grimani entered from their lurking-place.

"Well, Vittoria," inquired Contarini anxiously, "what was the purpose of this Austrian intrusion?"

Marco looked at her significantly. She hesitated.

"Well?" exclaimed Contarini with impatience.

"It was——" She stammered for the moment, but feeling it was in vain to conceal the truth, she added, with rapid utterance, "Alas, my father! he came here with a terrible purpose. Marco has struck that Austrian for the insult he offered to me."

"Struck Colonel Von Stettenheim!" exclaimed Contarini with dismay. "A challenge!" he murmured. "Heaven help us!"

And he turned with bitterness from Vittoria.

“Stettenheim for an antagonist!” muttered Grimani. “A heavy price to pay for the privilege of prayer.”

She felt utterly downcast in the consciousness of the terrible results of her indiscretion; but Marco drew her towards him, and kissed her with more than usual tenderness. “It was no fault of yours, sweet sister, that this insult was offered to you and to us. No blame rests on your head, whatever happens; remember that,” he added, in serious tone.

“Alas, Marco!” exclaimed Contarini, in deepest sorrow, “that you should have been rash enough to provoke an encounter with such an antagonist as Stettenheim.”

“Oh, my father!” responded Marco with fervour, “could any one worthy of the name of Contarini stand motionless as a statue, among a crowd of brutal Austrians, and listen to that triumphant boast—a sister’s name, a sister’s honour, trampled in

the dust? I tell you, I would have struck that man, if death had followed on the moment."

Count Contarini could not trust himself to make any reply to his son's words; he was fully persuaded that the encounter could have but one result, and with a gesture of despair he turned away.

Vittoria watched him with increased dismay. "Marco, dearest brother," she whispered in her anguish, "I beseech you not to fight this man."

"What do you say?" he asked in indignant voice.

"Perhaps an apology," she stammered.

"Impossible," he answered; "you do not know what you are saying."

"If I could only see Count Salvetti," she urged.

"Silence, Vittoria," he interposed with stern voice. "Never mention that word apology again, or dear as you are to me, I shall hate you. Recollect that my honour, the honour of our family,—more than all

this, the honour of Venice, compels this duel. Time presses; I have arrangements to make with Count Salvetti;" and he left the room.

"Lost! lost!" murmured Count Contarini, when his son had departed. "The last of my house sacrificed—the last of the Contarini. Aye, sacrificed to a woman's whim," he exclaimed, turning with anger on Vittoria—"a daughter's disobedience."

"Have mercy!" she pleaded, with tears in her eyes. "I would do anything to repair this mischief, endure any abasement, grovel to the dust to save his life."

"You can do nothing," her father answered with bitterness. "In such matters women can easily lay the fuel, but they cannot extinguish the flame. Remember this, if he fall to-morrow, his blood will be on your head—I will never look upon your face again." With these hard words Count Contarini turned away; and, almost tottering to a chair, sank down—burying his face in his hands.

It was well-nigh a father's curse. She sorely needed love and support, and Count Grimani stood apart perfectly impassive. Neither her sorrow nor her honour, seemed to evoke any sympathy in that stern, hard face. But in justice and defence it must be urged that Count Grimani was an enthusiastic patriot; for life or death he had verily put his hand to the plough; his thoughts were wholly absorbed by Venice, and a woman's error and a woman's sorrow, seemed small matters when measured against the thrilling hope of freedom and triumph. Still, Count Grimani was her only hope. "Carlo," she cried in her despair, "can nothing be done to avert this duel?"

"Nothing," he answered briefly. "Recollect a blow has been struck, and by the military code a blow must be washed away by blood."

"Has he any chance against this man?" she asked, with a sickening anticipation of the reply; and the reply justified the anticipation.

“I can give but little hope. It is very fatal to cross swords with Stettenheim.”

“Oh, miserable thought!” she murmured, “that I must remain quietly here while he faces death. Oh, Carlo! Carlo! for mercy’s sake, tell me there is something I can do.”

“I know of nothing,” he rejoined carelessly; and, scarcely measuring his words, he added, “Well, you can pray; women find prayer an employment for idle time.”

“I *can* pray,” she replied, stung to firmness by his mockery. “You may deride my weakness, but there is One to whose love weakness is a sure path—beyond the blue sky—Christ and His Mother’s love!” and she turned from him to seek that other help.

Patriot as he was, he forgot his burning hope as he gazed upon her, for she looked so noble beneath her weight of sorrow.

“Vittoria,” he exclaimed, “I see a way to save him.”

She flew to his side. “To save him! Oh, Carlo! I shall love you so much; you

will be so dear to me then ; ”—she grasped his hands—“ I shall love you with my whole heart.”

Such love was a great jewel, and Grimani knew it. “ I will save him,” he exclaimed with emphasis ; “ my word on it.”

“ How ? ” she inquired eagerly. “ Oh, tell me ! ”

“ Nay, I have my secret,” he answered. “ My work is never told in words.”

For all his pledge, she drew back from him in sorrow. “ Alas ! I guess the secret. You will save his life, as you would vindicate my honour—the dagger. No, Count Grimani ; I have a better way.”

“ A better way ! ” he exclaimed with surprise. “ What way ? ”

“ That prayer which you despise,” she answered ; and once more she turned aside from him, and the knell of the Angelus was borne across the water.

Count Grimani shrugged his shoulders contemptuously ; women and their fancies were beyond the ken of his materialistic

theories ; but he resolved to hold to his own method, and at all hazards save the life of Marco. He withdrew by the panel passage, and Vittoria threw herself in devotion before a shrine of the Virgin, which the piety of her ancestors had made portion of the furniture of the chamber, and she prayed fervently that the curse which hung over her head might mercifully be averted.

CHAPTER III.

THE FRANCISCAN SETS HIS OWN TRAP.

BARON FALKENBERG had surveyed the horizon, and duly noted the clouds. He was fully conscious of the gravity of the situation, but he was not dismayed. He had perfect faith in that great bureaucratic system in which he had been nurtured—he had been taught to believe, and he did very firmly believe, that red-tape and dockets govern the world, always premising that the red-tape must be tied according to traditional knot, and the dockets folded according to traditional pattern. Thus, possessing the tape, the dockets, the tying, and folding, you possessed the rod of em-

pire. Granted the difficulty of the situation, the solution was perfectly simple—if red-tape and dockets were good for ordinary conditions, then more red-tape and more dockets would be required for extraordinary ones—given only more official minutiae, more official zeal, and the *status in quo* would be effectually preserved.

I do not affirm that Baron Falkenberg's theory has always been successful in practice—quite the contrary; but it is a theory of such transparent simplicity, and it lends itself so easily to the comprehension of mankind, that it has always been a favourite with persons who are miscalled statesmen, and many nations which have gone to wreck and ruin through its practice, have faithfully adhered to it as a method of political and social restoration.

Well, Italy was in a ferment—Germany was in a ferment—Venice was in a ferment, but Baron Falkenberg was master of himself. The great deep underlying influences which sway mankind were moving like the

ground-swell ere the coming storm—but Baron Falkenberg stood firmly rooted upon his bureaucratic faith. I will not say he was calm—the perfect official is usually fussy on great occasions, for an aggregate of small things is not conducive to calmness, and with Baron Falkenberg zeal took the form of petulance—but every official appliance was in perfect order; outside, indeed, the vast movement towards Italian unity—inside, an office working at high-pressure tension—spies everywhere, spying everything—zealous clerks at huge folios, recording everything alphabetically, with accurately-ruled margins—nothing too big, nothing too little for their penmanship—a touch of a bell from Baron Falkenberg's desk, and a clerk, breathless with hurry, and excitement, and zeal, would in two minutes produce a ponderous tome, containing the sayings and doings of this or that suspected family.

It so chanced that on the evening of the very day on which Count Platten had con-

veyed the challenge to Marco Contarini, Baron Falkenberg was pacing up and down his official chamber on the tip-toe of expectation; the whole power of his office had been unsuccessfully applied to the capture of Count Grimani, but the last new spy who had been enlisted into the service had satisfactorily indicated the whereabouts of the fugitive, and had moreover undertaken to lead a posse of police agents to the very spot where, at a given hour, he would probably be found.

The Baron was not best pleased with the authorities at Vienna; he had just received a despatch ordering two more regiments to leave the garrison of Venice and join the head-quarters of the army on the Mincio—he had undertaken to hold the city with a given number of men, but this number had already been greatly reduced—and this, too, in the face of vague rumours of an intended *émeute*.

“Does the Council at Vienna,” he murmured, “think I can hold the city by moral

force? I might hold it with half the number of men, if I could lay hands on that arch-conspirator, Grimani, the very soul of that infernal National Society. I've held the cursed brood a dozen times in my hand, but at the grasp of my fingers they slip away like phantoms." He struck the bell upon his desk with petulant force—an obsequious office messenger responded quickly to the summons.

"Any fresh intelligence of this Grimani? Has Father Onofrio returned?"

"Not yet, your Excellency."

"Let him report himself to me the moment he enters."

"Number 23 has just reported himself," observed the messenger.

"The Contarini spy!" exclaimed the Baron. "Where is he?"

"With the chief clerk of the secret intelligence department, undergoing the formal interrogatories."

"I'll question him myself," exclaimed Falkenberg. "Send him in, and let him be

accompanied by the clerk who enters letter 'C.' "

With a profound bow the messenger left the chamber.

"These Contarini must be closely watched," muttered Falkenberg. "There's danger in that old Count Contarini, with his affected submission to our rule. I'll wager my life that this plot for an insurrection is being hatched under his very roof." The clerk of letter "C" entered with a heavy ledger-like book under his arm, which he laid on the desk before his chief.

"Find the Contarini heading!"

The clerk obeyed, opening the book at the required place.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Falkenberg with surprise and extreme displeasure; "what's the meaning of this? no margin, and no ruled lines! Is this a time, sir, to despise the great traditions of our office?" he asked with severity.

The clerk of letter "C" grew very red,

and stammered something about a new clerk and press of business, and he thought perhaps it wouldn't matter!

"Not matter, sir!" exclaimed Falkenberg with vehemence; "fidelity in the little is fidelity in the large. Pshaw!" he continued peevishly, "I can't read without a proper margin. I've always been accustomed to a margin—a margin is the essence of official life. What's this? 'Lock hampered yesterday,' 'detected strange voice;' hum—send in the spy."

The clerk obeyed with alacrity; he was only too happy to escape from further dissertation upon marginal virtue. Pietro was ushered into the room; he had doffed his livery, and assumed the disguise of a gondolier. He felt very ill at ease; it was the second time he had stood face to face with Baron Falkenberg in an official position, and an interview with the Baron was not a thing to be lightly forgotten.

"Well, you lazy scoundrel, you've not managed to earn your ten thousand florins all this time."

“Not yet, your Excellency,” answered Pietro in trembling voice; “but I shall soon, I’m sure I shall—only give me time.”

“Has that lock been hampered again?” inquired Falkenberg, referring to the ledger.

“The lock is right enough, please your Excellency,” replied Pietro, with a cunning grin; “it was the door, which was fastened against me this morning when I tried to enter the saloon. I again detected a strange voice.”

“And when they admitted you?” eagerly inquired the Baron.

“I found nobody but the Count and his daughter,” rejoined Pietro.

The Baron again consulted the ledger, and carefully weighed the recorded information. All the movements of the Count were accurately noted, together with his household expenditure to the smallest item.

“Draw an order for the arrest of Count Contarini!” exclaimed the Baron, after a short period of thought. “I’ll sign it forthwith——”

The office messenger entered to inform the Baron of Father Onofrio's return.

"Send him in!" exclaimed the Baron, with impatience.

Father Onofrio, as he was styled, was the last spy added to the staff of the Secret Intelligence Department. He had been recommended by a spy in whom great confidence was placed. This Onofrio confessed that he had himself tampered with dangerous things and dangerous persons; but he had been snubbed and slighted by the National Society. He was needy, well-nigh starving—he was ready to sell his knowledge for very bread; and, although he had never *quite* succeeded in effecting the arrest of any of the members of the dangerous band, his information up to a certain point had been proved to be correct. It must be mentioned that the Baron personally, did not by any means approve of the *soi-disant* Father. The man was rough and brusque, dare-devil and defiant; he was accustomed doggedly to dictate his own course of action.

This was objectionable enough, but the sting lay in the fact, that the spy's suggestions were manifestly superior to the suggestions emanating from the Baron, whose *amour propre* was thereby constantly wounded. Nevertheless, Onofrio was not a man to be discarded at a desperate juncture.

Father Onofrio was announced, and Count Grimani stalked into the room in the garb of a Franciscan. He loved the disguise; he was forced to tell lies, and he enjoyed the satire of telling them in the despised dress of a monk. There was a marked contrast between his manner and the obsequious manner of Pietro. Without the slightest invitation on the part of the Baron, he threw himself into a chair, and thrust out his legs with affected weariness.

"Have you secured that devil, Grimani?" inquired the Baron eagerly.

"All but," was the answer vouchsafed.

"All but!" exclaimed the Baron with impatience,—“the old story.”

“No thanks, of course,” retorted Grimani, sullenly. “Why, we tracked the fox to his hole—fox, do I say? No, bird; for he must have escaped us by flight through the air. Every cranny that a weasel could have wriggled through was stopped. I held the salt in hand; just one pinch on his tail, I said, and the ten thousand florins are mine; but the bird had flown!”

“Curses on it!” ejaculated Falkenberg.

“My own exclamation,” continued Grimani, calmly, “for I had lost the ten thousand florins; but we gained something—we seized a printing-press, and a lot of papers just worked off—a proclamation, apparently! Come, come,” and Grimani’s manner changed to banter; “you’ve got him, Baron—pshaw! you’re playing with me—you’ve got him.”

“No, I tell you!” answered Falkenberg, in a provoked tone.

“Why, he flew into your hands!” exclaimed Grimani, derisively. “On the best authority, he fled to the Palazzo Contarini; what was Pietro doing?”

“The fool is here,” rejoined Falkenberg, glancing sternly at Pietro. “Let him speak for himself.”

“Oh, holy father!” cried Pietro, with alarm; “if I had only known——”

“You might have guessed it,” answered Grimani. “That hampered lock, Pietro—that hampered lock, yesterday!—this morning! You let the prize slip through your hands.”

“Fool and idiot!” exclaimed Falkenberg, with more than usual petulance. “I’ll have you strung up as a traitor—that I will!”

“Mercy! your Excellency,” whined Pietro, in abject terror—“mercy! This Grimani is too much for a man’s wits.”

“To think we should have lost such a chance!” continued Falkenberg, losing all command of temper. “Well, if we’ve not secured Grimani, at least we’ll make sure of one traitor—Contarini shall be arrested forthwith.”

“Contarini arrested!” exclaimed Grimani, without betraying any emotion.

“The warrant’s being now drawn; every hole and corner of that cursed palazzo shall be searched.”

“By all means,” answered Grimani, quietly; “but if you intend playing the game in that manner, I must throw up the cards.”

“What do you mean?” asked Falkenberg, nettled by the significant smile on Grimani’s lips.

“Why, the thing’s as clear as day,” exclaimed Grimani, with assumed impatience. “If you arrest Contarini, you scare the bird from the covert; leave Contarini undisturbed, and Grimani must be caught in the trap.”

“Aye, aye,” assented Falkenberg, with very ill grace. “We’ll draw a cordon of spies round the house. Pietro can manage to conceal some of our most trusty men; then at a signal——”

“Then at a signal!” echoed Grimani, contemptuously. “Pshaw! Do you think that’s the sort of snare to set for Grimani?”

Why, Grimani can scent an Austrian plot a mile off. No, no; there must be no cordon of spies, no police concealed in the house—the game must be played by Pietro alone. There, Baron, my hand on it,” and he griped Falkenberg’s hand with sudden grasp; “to-morrow evening, Count Grimani in his own person shall stand face to face with you.” He then turned to Pietro. “The game is in your hands, Pietro; be on the alert. When you have ascertained that Grimani is really in the Palazzo Contarini, you must give some signal——”

“I have it!” exclaimed Falkenberg, anxious to contribute some slight quota to the scheme. “A gondolier shall be kept plying, as if by accident, before the Palazzo; at a wave of the hand he shall shoot beneath the balcony. Drop this signet ring to him.” Falkenberg drew the ring from his finger, and gave it to Pietro. “In ten minutes the house shall be surrounded by soldiers.”

“Excellent device,” exclaimed Grimani,

in patronizing tone; "but don't let spy or soldier approach until Pietro gives the signal, or all the labour will be lost. To your post, Pietro," he continued; "vigilance, and the reward is ours."

"Your last chance, Pietro!" said Falkenberg, with threatening gesture. "Success, and your fortune is made; failure, and, by Heaven——" Pietro, with many bows and protestations of zeal, shuffled out of the room, right glad to make his escape with a whole skin.

"Any further commands?" demanded Grimani, lapsing into his usual dogged manner.

"No; by the way, the papers you seized?"

"I had almost forgotten them," answered Grimani, carelessly. "A proclamation from the secret society;" and he handed a roll of paper to Falkenberg, who scanned one of the copies with eagerness, Grimani standing close at hand, and looking over his shoulder as he read.

“Hum! Signed by the scoundrel himself,” observed Falkenberg. “Come, this is satisfactory. See, ‘The Secret Society of Venice strictly commands all true patriots to abstain from acts of violence towards the Austrians.’ ”

“Very satisfactory,” rejoined Grimani, drily.

“After all, this paper may only be some blind,” said Falkenberg, cautiously.

“It may,” assented Grimani, with that smile which always irritated his employer.

“I’ll not relax my vigilance,” said Falkenberg, endeavouring to command his temper. “If you have any intelligence to communicate, I shall be at Colonel von Stettenheim’s quarters this evening.

Falkenberg withdrew, but not before Grimani had succeeded in purloining the Vienna despatch from his pocket. A mean act, truly, but it was done for the love of Venice. Grimani glanced rapidly through the document. “Two more regiments ordered to the frontier! Then to-

morrow evening we strike the blow, and Venice will be free ! ” He cast the paper from him, and, with that burning hope of freedom, tears filled his eyes—the tears of a hard, stern man are more terrible than his curse ; they told the story of a soul writhing with bitterness and shame, for Count Grimani was a patriot, and not a slave. He felt that he possessed the qualities of a statesman, and he was forced to pursue a calling which he abhorred. He knew, as his tears fell on the rough, brown sleeve, that freedom would wash the stain of falsehood and deceit from his soul ; no longer a mean trickster through the curse of tyranny, but a freeman, with freedom’s gift of truth and honour. “ Not yet,” he murmured, “ not this night, but to-morrow—death or liberty ; and now, one *last* lie to save that rash boy’s life, and win Vittoria’s cold heart ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAFÉ SINGER.

MAXIMILIAN VON STETTENHEIM was adored by every man in his regiment. He was by popular admission the very beau ideal of an officer and an accomplished gentleman. It must be confessed that he offered a very fascinating but evil example to the young officers who fell under his command. He was handsome and of gallant bearing; he possessed a *bonhommie* which was irresistible; and he viewed all the events of life through a medium of good-natured, easy cynicism, which was very piquant and amusing. And this tinge of cynicism was ever deepest and most amusing in its spirit

of depreciation when women and love formed the topic of conversation. Nor was even the thought of death free from this taint. "I've tasted all the pleasures," he would affirm—"drained the cup—repetition is not happiness!" and, as the smoke of the cigar curled from his handsome lips, the young men who listened to his words, thought that cynicism was the greatest of all gifts, and that a light sneer afforded the best solution for the riddles of human life; and they little witted, and as little he as they, that their master would one day learn, and through that very love which he so greatly despised, the fallacy of this mess-room philosophy. In a strictly military point of view, Colonel Von Stettenheim was admitted on all hands to be a magnificent regimental officer. He had gained his command at an early age, through Court influence, but he had deserved it for acts of cool audacity on the battle-field; and he possessed the power, which only belongs to men of power, of converting the easiest and

most familiar manner of the mess-room and social intercourse, into the rigid disciplinarianism of the parade-ground.

The Third Regiment of Croats was quartered in one of the forts which commanded the entrance landwards to Venice. Colonel von Stettenheim had for quarters a casemate chamber of large dimensions, and furnished with the necessaries, but certainly not the luxuries of life. There were sufficient tables and chairs, however, to accommodate all the officers when the Colonel gave a reception. In one corner of the room, screened off by a large folding screen, stood the Colonel's camp bed and toilet appliances. The Colonel's receptions were most popular, particularly with the younger officers. It was a recognized principle that every one was at perfect liberty to sing, laugh, talk, and make unrestricted noise, at pleasure. The tables were covered with varieties of drinks—Vienna beer being the special favourite—and tobacco in unlimited quantities; indeed,

an atmosphere of smoke, dense as a London fog, was held to be a necessary element in the entertainment.

The reception to which Baron Falkenberg was about to repair possessed a particular interest. The Colonel had announced his intention of offering to his guests some special attraction, the nature of which he declined to divulge. Always noisy as these entertainments were, the tiptoe of expectation added to the restless turmoil. Colonel von Stettenheim and three other officers of more mature age, were striving manfully to carry on a rubber in defiance of laughter and song; but old choruses of student life surged up ever and anon, and their boisterous jollity rendered scientific card-playing well-nigh impossible. Chief favourite of all these choruses, was that familiar student chorus, which embodies as a maxim, and not as a protest, in rhyming Latin verses set to a tune of swinging lilt, those words of St. Paul, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." "*Gaudeamus igitur*, let

us rejoice, therefore, whilst we are young, because, after jolly youth, and after decrepit old age, the grave lays hold of us." The chorus was in thorough harmony with the Colonel's philosophy; and it was a right good chorus for light hearts to carol in that *gaieté de cœur* of youth, ere the coming of the latter days, when indigestion and the many other ills this flesh is heir to, convert the maxim into a sarcasm.

But though the philosophy of the song accorded with the Colonel's theories of life, the noise was too much for endurance. The Colonel lost the rubber. "Come, you fellows," he exclaimed in good-humoured protest; "less of that dreadful row. Here's a compact with you. Relieve us from this abuse of vocal art, and I'll reward you with songs worth the hearing."

"Hurrah, gentlemen," exclaimed a young officer; "Colonel Max is about to give us a song."

"Bravo!" was the cry from all parts of the chamber. "Silence for Colonel Max!"

“Songs, gentlemen,” exclaimed the Colonel, “but not from my lips. I’ve engaged that little minx, the café singer, Stella, to come to my rooms to-night.”

The announcement was received with general acclamation.

“Little Stella,” exclaimed an officer, “with her delicious affectation of modesty!”

“And all her wicked impudence underneath,” rejoined another officer. “What, guitar and all, Colonel Max?”

“Yes, guitar, and impudence, and modesty, all combined,” answered the Colonel. “Egad, the girl was half afraid to venture here alone, in such—what shall I say?—good company; but I’ve pledged my word she shall be treated like a princess at the very least. And now, young gentlemen, as a reward for my generous act, permit us, ancient fogies as we are, to play our game in peace.” The Colonel resumed his seat. “Deal, Major Stoltz!” and the Major proceeded to shuffle the cards; but the game was interrupted by the entrance of Baron Falkenberg.

“Ah, Baron,” exclaimed the Colonel, rising to meet his guest; “welcome to a soldier’s quarters. Gentlemen, permit me—Baron Falkenberg! Pshaw! you all know the Baron—the guardian angel of every son of the Fatherland here in Venice.”

“By the way, Baron,” inquired Major Stoltz in a slight tone of banter, “is that fellow Grimani secured yet?”

“Not a fair question, Stoltz,” interrupted the Colonel; “military men have no business to pry into the mystery of civil affairs.”

“Egad,” exclaimed Falkenberg, somewhat nettled, “I wish some of you gentlemen had the pleasure of looking after that scoundrel. He leads me a perfect life of hide and seek.”

“Come, I’ll undertake to find him for you,” exclaimed the Colonel.

“Where I fail, you’d find it a hard matter to succeed,” rejoined Falkenberg, somewhat pettishly.

“Pardon me,” continued the Colonel.

“The truth is, you civilians leave these Venetians too much alone.”

“Leave them alone! Why, I watch them day and night!”

“I mean, you should endeavour to cultivate friendly relations with them—force them into terms of intimacy—break up that frozen barrier which stands between Austria and Venice.”

“Kiss the fair Venetians!” exclaimed Falkenberg, with a significant laugh.

“Well, that’s one method,” rejoined the Colonel.

“And a good method, too,” cried several officers. “Bravo, Colonel Max, kissing for ever!”

“You youngsters must remember,” answered the Colonel in a tone of affected authority, “that in the matter of kissing, Colonels are permitted a certain discretionary power which is denied to subalterns.”

This dictum was met by a protesting murmur.

“Take my word for it, Baron,” continued

the Colonel with a smile, "there's philosophy in a kiss. It destroys isolation. A kiss must have a sequence!"

"A sequence, yes—a blow!" rejoined Falkenberg drily. "I accept your words. Did you count the cost of that kiss, Colonel?"

"An impulse of the moment—some devil or the other of mischief had got into my blood; I can't account for it otherwise. I'd long been provoked beyond endurance by the quiet insolence of these Venetian women—the insufferable contempt they show towards us. I hadn't a conception who the girl really was, and, for the matter of that, it was pitch dark, and I never saw her face after all, more's the pity; they say it's a face worth looking at. A shriek—a black veil; I tore it aside—more shrieks; but I kissed her lips, egad—*voilà tout!*"

"Not *voilà tout*," persisted Falkenberg; "a duel."

"Be it a duel," rejoined the Colonel. "I

shall disarm that boy—or a flesh wound, perhaps; the seconds will interpose, the honour of everybody will be satisfied—*c'est fini!*”

Falkenberg coughed a sceptical “hum,” and Stettenheim turned towards an orderly who was waiting to address him.

An Italian monk desired to see Colonel von Stettenheim on pressing business—the man would take no denial. The Colonel, with some impatience, gave directions to the orderly for the monk to be admitted.

“Has Stella arrived?” inquired a chorus of anxious voices.

“You impatient boys!” answered the Colonel. “When you have reached my mature age, you’ll discover that no one woman is worth all this fuss; the world is full enough of women, in all conscience, and one woman is extraordinarily like another.”

Grimani, in his Franciscan disguise, was ushered in by the orderly. His manner was entirely changed—he feigned intense terror; his features were those of a man who had

experienced some great alarm—he stood dazed and helpless in the middle of the room.

“Why, it’s Onofrio!” exclaimed Falkenberg with surprise.

“You know the fellow, do you?” said Stettenheim.

“One of our spies, that’s all,” answered Falkenberg. “What do you do here?” he inquired in a tone of displeasure.

As soon as Falkenberg had spoken, Grimani slunk up to him and cowered at his feet. “Oh, Baron!” he cried in a thick tremulous voice, “it’s a mercy I’m alive—the saints protect us! I was going on my way when I left you—— Is it safe for me to speak?” he asked, glancing round in abject fear.

“You are safe enough here; these barracks are strong enough to protect you,” replied Falkenberg gruffly.

“No place is safe,” answered Grimani, clutching the Baron’s hand in terror; “that fearful National Society can pierce

all walls—aye, doors of iron. I was seized, gagged, my eyes bandaged, a pistol held at my forehead: ‘Your life is forfeited!’ whispered a voice in my ear. ‘It is known to the Secret Society that you are an Austrian spy—every movement of yours is watched!’ My throat is dry!” he gasped. “Drink, drink!”

A young officer good-naturedly brought him some wine, which he drank eagerly. “‘Your life is forfeited,’ whispered the voice, ‘for treachery to Venice!’ The cold metal touched my brow—I tasted death. After a terrible pause the voice continued, ‘Your life is spared—the hand of the avenger is stayed—the Secret Society chooses you as an instrument for its work: do that work or die!’”

“And the work?” exclaimed Falkenberg.

“I swore only to reveal it to the person whose interest it concerns.”

“His name?” asked Falkenberg.

“Colonel von Stettenheim!”

“I am Colonel von Stettenheim!” exclaimed the Colonel, coming forward.

“ Good sir, you are Colonel von Stettenheim ? ” and Grimani rose to his feet.

“ Yes, I tell you ; say what you have to say, and be brief.”

“ We must be alone,” muttered Grimani.

“ By your leave, gentlemen,” exclaimed the Colonel with impatience, “ I’ll hear what the fellow has to say ; ” and Falkenberg and the officers retired apart.

“ This letter from the Secret Society of Venice to you, Colonel von Stettenheim,” and Grimani thrust a letter into the Colonel’s hand.

“ Pshaw ! is that all ? ” exclaimed the Colonel, and he glanced over the contents.

“ Good sir,” continued Grimani in an undertone, “ the voice bade me tell you that if you disobeyed the injunction you would surely die, that no power on earth can save you from vengeance, that the Secret Society would strike you down amid the bayonets of your men—the bayonets of your men ! ” he reiterated emphatically. “ Oh, sir, be guided by me ! ”

“Gentlemen,” exclaimed Stettenheim in an indignant tone, “this letter is a very simple affair.”

“For Heaven’s sake,” whispered Grimani in the Colonel’s ear, “do not provoke vengeance by a revelation of the secret.”

“Silence, fellow!” answered the Colonel, thrusting Grimani aside. “Gentlemen, the National Society threatens me with death if Marco Contarini fall in this duel to-morrow. Assassination! the vile cowards, do they think this threat will stay my hand?”

“I pray you, sir,” interposed Grimani with strong affectation of terror, “to think well of it. I speak as one whose own life is threatened.”

“You have done your work, fellow—go!” answered Stettenheim with contempt.

“No, no; for mercy’s sake don’t drive me forth—it’s death to me—death!”

“This is folly, Onofrio!” exclaimed Falkenberg, entirely deceived by the spy’s simulation of terror.

Grimani, with a look of despair, turned to the Baron and clung to him. "Save me, save me!" he cried in a piteous voice. "I dare not venture forth alone. I'm known as a spy now—it's death, death, I say!"

"We can give the fellow shelter till you go, Baron," said Stettenheim, moved to pity by Grimani's exhibition of alarm. "Ho, there!" An orderly entered in obedience to the summons. "Let this devout priest remain in the guard-room until Baron Falkenberg leaves the barracks."

"A thousand blessings for this protection," murmured Grimani; "a thousand blessings!" and, conducted by the orderly, he left the chamber. He felt he had won his point. "Bluster as he may, my gallant Colonel will think twice, before he allows his sword to do mortal injury to Marco Contarini."

Stettenheim was irritated rather than alarmed by the threat. "By my soul," he exclaimed, "the insolence of these Venetians increases day by day! You'll join us

in our game, Baron? Egad, I wish the curs would rise and meet us hand to hand—a dose of lead would teach them better manners. I pray you, gentlemen, make merry. I'm sorry this singing girl has broken her faith; but if we lack the song, we've got the wine. My next invitation shall be a command." An orderly entered and addressed a few words to the Colonel. "Ah, a woman below!" he exclaimed. "Hurrah, the girl has come at last, my boys! Here, some of you gallant fellows, go and welcome her. A princess, remember—I've given my word for an honourable greeting." The Colonel's commands were readily obeyed. "Let those boys run after a woman if they will," he exclaimed with cynical brightness; "we have all been runners after that delusive prize in our day, and now the day has arrived for sitting still, hey Baron? Come, you, and I, and the Major, and our good friend the doctor here, will stick to cards. For my part, I've arrived at an age when that jade Fortune

courted at cards, is just as fascinating as the smiles of a woman."

"The *salons* of Vienna tell another tale," observed Falkenberg with a dry laugh.

"Ah, Baron, never believe what walls whisper—lath and plaster is a sad liar."

"I stand by my story," persisted the Baron; "in love or war, Colonel von Stettenheim always wins the victory."

"Come, come, Baron, not this levity amid the solemnity of whist—it's for you to deal."

Half-dragged, half-led, but with reluctant steps, and evidently dismayed by the boisterous greeting, the woman, closely veiled by the accustomed mantilla, was conducted triumphantly to Stettenheim's chamber. As she entered she was greeted by cries of "Brava! Stella, brava!" and, surrounded by officers, she was led up to the whist table.

Stettenheim was engaged in sorting his cards, and his back was towards her. He was not at the trouble to rise or even turn

his head: he addressed her in tones of good-natured banter.

“Ah, faithless girl! better late than never. However, make up for it by giving these gentlemen some of your raciest songs—those extra wicked songs, I mean.”

“Brava! the wicked songs,” was echoed by a dozen voices.

“Let the girl have room to sing, gentlemen!” exclaimed Stettenheim; “make a circle. Begin Stella; no time to lose.”

The woman addressed a few words in a low tone to an officer near her.

“Hey, what does she say?” inquired Stettenheim.

“She says she wishes to see you alone,” replied the officer.

The words were greeted by a chorus of laughter.

“Nonsense, I don’t want to see her,” rejoined Stettenheim. “I want to hear her voice.”

The woman again spoke to the officer.

“Colonel Max, there’s some mistake; it

isn't Stella after all ; it's a lady who wishes to see you."

The badinage and banter waxed still more vehement.

"Well, gentlemen !" exclaimed Falkenberg, rising from his chair, "I think, under these delicate circumstances, it would be becoming in us to withdraw."

"Nonsense !" exclaimed Stettenheim, somewhat annoyed. "Pray sit still, Baron ; the lady must be good enough to wait until our game is finished, or go, if she prefers that course. I'm too much accustomed to impertinent intrusions of this sort," he added, in a lower tone. "It's for me to play, isn't it?" and he threw down his card.

The group round the woman was broken up, and for the moment she was left standing alone. She elected to remain, and the young officer she had addressed, led her aside, and politely placed a chair for her behind the screen, which sheltered her from the general gaze of the room.

It is difficult to say how long this shelter would have been sufficient to save her from impertinent intrusion. A veil over a woman's face is a great provocation to curiosity ; and it was clearly manifest by his manner of reception, that their host did not consider her worthy of very dignified treatment : some excitement, moreover, was needful to compensate for the loss of the café singer's racy songs ; but fortune favoured the lady's incognito through a happy diversion of interest created by the arrival of Count Platten.

“ Here's Platten ! ” was the cry on all sides ; it was well known the mission upon which Platten had been engaged.

“ Platten is acting as my second in this duel ! ” exclaimed the Colonel, by way of excuse, to Falkenberg, as he rose from the table. “ Well, Platten, will the fellow fight ? ”

“ He doesn't flinch, I'll say that for him,” answered Platten.

“ Have you made all the arrangements ? ”

“ The shore of the Lido ; at daybreak to-morrow.”

“ Excellent ! we shall be in good time for parade afterwards.”

Count Platten's entrance was quickly followed by that of the Sergeant-Major, who attended for the purpose of announcing to the Colonel that the patrol was about to leave the barracks.

“ As late as that ? ” exclaimed Stettenheim. “ Gentlemen, the Sergeant-Major reminds us of duty—one word before we part. This duel is to the death ; either I or Marco Contarini must fall. I'll shake each man's hand.”

They all shook hands with him and bade him adieu, but they had little fear that their champion would be worsted in the encounter.

“ Good-night, Platten ; I shall expect you at four o'clock to-morrow morning ; have a gondola in readiness. I leave everything in your hands.”

Falkenberg was about to withdraw with

the rest. "Come, Baron, you needn't run away; if we have been baulked in our whist, we can at least have a quiet game at *écarté*. Pshaw! this is not the first duel I have fought; the work I have on hand won't make me a dull companion, I promise you."

"Thanks, Colonel; but I've got that spy of mine to look after; and, pardon me, if I remind you that you have a lady waiting your leisure."

"I quite forgot it," answered Stettenheim, with a laugh; "but nonsense, Baron, a trifle like that needn't drive you away."

"You really must excuse me. I shall take advantage of the patrol to reach my own quarters. Farewell."

"If it must be so, then farewell."

"Don't forget your engagement to me for to-morrow evening!" exclaimed Falkenberg, turning back on the threshold; "half-past nine the General and staff sup with me at the Café Quadri."

"I shall be with you, Baron, life permitting."

“Your life is safe enough with such an antagonist,” answered Falkenberg, with a sneer. “By the way, you will have to pass my quarters; call in for me at a quarter to nine.”

“Good,” answered Stettenheim, and Falkenberg departed, leaving the Colonel alone with the veiled stranger.

Although a duel was on the *tapis*, there was much mirth among the young subalterns as they crowded out of the Colonel's chamber. “*Gaudeamus*” had a verse fitting for the occasion, and derisive snatches of chorus were borne down the long stone corridor. “*Vivant omnes virgines*,” young and lovely, of course. “*Vivant et mulieres* ;” it was in truth the very song for an earthly paradise, only death sat piping an obligato accompaniment: “*Nos habebit humus*.”

Stettenheim, without noticing the woman, proceeded with studied unconcern to the table at the end of the chamber, and having selected a cigar, and lighted it with great

care, he threw himself at perfect ease into an arm-chair.

“ Well, my girl, I’m at your service.”

In answer to his summons, the woman advanced a few steps towards him with trembling gait.

Ere this, he had not been even at the pains to look at her; but a moment’s glance revealed the beauty of her form and struck him with admiration.

“ A charming figure!” he exclaimed, with sudden enthusiasm; “ if the face is only half as lovely,” and he gazed at her as a man might gaze on the perfect symmetry of a horse.

“ Come, throw off that veil, and let’s see the face ;” and his gaze was an insult, and the woman felt that her beauty was degradation. With trembling fingers and almost involuntary action, she obeyed his command and drew aside the veil, and Vittoria Contarini stood before the Austrian officer in all her beauty of form and face, with down-cast eyes and countenance flushed with

shame and indignation; and he, lolling insolently in his chair, gazed shamelessly on her beauty.

I have said she might have sat to Bonifazio, aye, or to those greater masters, Titian and Veronese, and they would have delighted to paint her face, worthy of their highest intellectual efforts—clothing her fair form in those rich Venetian tissues, and those mysteries of light and shade, and that golden glow of their wondrous power.

Still sitting, he let her stand before him, and eagerly drank in her beauty. “By my soul, a lovely face!” he murmured; “eyes with passion lulled to rest, and lips—full lips—and blushes, too—blushes in a barrack! Oh, wondrous gift to have retained the power of blushing!”

His loathsome admiration and the bitterness of his badinage, nerved her at last—falling back apace, she drew herself up to her full height, and with her countenance full of dignity and pride and indignation, she met his gaze, face to face, unflinchingly.

“Sir, I am the Countess Vittoria Contarini.”

He was utterly taken aback—confused; but far less by the announcement of her name, than by the nobility of her presence—it needed no name, indeed, to tell him that he was sitting in the presence of a lady. He arose, stammering some excuse, and offered her a chair—she declined his offered with dignified gesture. He had met many women ere this, and he thought he had fathomed the mystery of woman’s nature; but he only knew women in their degradation—proud, it may be, insolent and domineering, but still degraded—he had never yet met a woman in all her grandeur and purity. He felt she was different from all other women he had ever met, but *how* different, he had yet to learn; and he little deemed that in this knowledge she was destined to be his teacher.

“Allow me, madam, to offer a thousand apologies for the rudeness of your reception. For the honour of our service, I pray you to

believe me, that if I had had the slightest conception it was a lady who sought this interview—but you entered wholly unannounced.”

“I acquit you of all blame,” she answered, accepting the *amende* with quiet dignity. “But these are officers’ quarters ; I did not dare to announce my name.” She felt the change in his bearing and demeanour, which her assumption of dignity had wrought ; but if a thought of exultation flashed through her mind, it was quickly effaced by the recollection of the supreme purpose which had led her in her hopeless despair to seek such an interview. Her voice and countenance quickly revealed the anxiety of her heart.

“I know what I risk in coming here—the bitterness of scandal—contempt of the world—scorn of my own countrymen—hatred of my family ; they would kill me if they knew it ; but I am ready to bear all shame, endure all scorn—only grant the prayer I make ; spare my brother when he stands before you to-morrow.”

The woman was at his mercy; her countenance was one to which emotion lent fresh and varied interest; he was at least resolved to enjoy this revelation of beauty to the utmost bound.

“Madam, a duel is the fortune of war,” he answered, with affected coldness.

“Nay, in this case, the certainty of death,” she exclaimed, with increased agitation. “How should a mere boy meet you? Is he a foeman worthy of your steel? Have mercy on me,” she prayed piteously; “it is a sister who prays this mercy.”

“The military code of Austria,” he rejoined. “I have no freedom in this matter.”

“Does that code counsel you to kill a boy? Is that a law for brave men?”

There was a tone of sarcasm in her voice. He was at a loss for a reply. With a shrug of the shoulders and an ejaculation, “Well, well,” he turned away.

“No, answer me,” she cried. “I appeal from a conventional law to the noblest feeling of your heart. Nay, do not turn away

—look me in the face, and tell me that this is a law for brave men.” He had meant to revel in her beauty, and she was challenging him to look upon her face.

“He might avoid this duel,” he answered with embarrassed air. “An apology, even—and yet I know not that I dare accept an apology.”

“He dare not make one,” she rejoined. “I have striven for it, but it was in vain. His honour is too deeply pledged with his own countrymen. He can die, but a coward he cannot be.”

This answer relieved him from his dilemma.

“Well, madam, what would you have me do?”

“Spare him. You are master of your weapon—a flesh wound, not death.”

“Impossible!” he answered.

“Impossible!” she cried, in a voice of anguish. “No, not that word—that word of misery. His death is mine; have mercy on a woman. Nay, take your triumph, if you will; tell the world that a Venetian

girl, the daughter of the proud house of Contarini, humbled herself before the Austrian officer, and begged her brother's life; and that he, touched by her abject misery, granted her prayer."

"Madam, it cannot be. Nay, I do pity you. I would do all in my power to help you; but the Secret Society of Venice has rendered all forbearance on my part impossible. Their act, not my will, binds me to this work. A threat of death by the dagger hangs over my head, if harm befall your brother. Mark me, if I spare his life, I stand before my comrades as a coward awed by a company of miserable assassins. I dare not flinch; I am forced in very honour to defy this threat. This duel must be to the death."

"Oh misery!" she exclaimed; "what is this you tell me?"

"Here's the letter, madam—read it;" and he placed the threatening letter in her hand.

Dazed and bewildered, scarcely knowing

what she uttered, she exclaimed at a moment's glance: "Count Grimani's writing. This, then, was the meaning of his promise."

He caught at her words. "His promise!" he exclaimed; "you have seen Count Grimani lately, then? His promise! Doubtless you are aware of the lurking-place of this arch-conspirator? By my soul, if Baron Falkenberg had the slightest suspicion of this!——"

Terrified at the admission she had made, she threw herself in an agony of fear at Stettenheim's feet.

"Have mercy on me, he is my affianced husband; do not make me his betrayer."

The woman was at his feet; but he had only conquered her through the very superiority of his vantage ground. As she knelt to him in her misery and tears, he rapidly reviewed the situation. He was resolved to win her—he was resolved to make this Venetian girl, with her beauty and her grandeur, the crowning triumph of

his life. Not a single point must be thrown away.

“Rise, madam,” he said with the utmost courtesy. “I am a soldier, not a police-agent—have no fear. Those random words which you have uttered are safe with me. On my honour, I will not betray you.”

“How can I find words of gratitude?” she answered, and tears of gratitude stood in her eyes. He thought he had made a master-stroke by this manifestation of generosity; he little guessed the use to which her noble nature would turn it.

“I will plead no longer,” she exclaimed, with an expression of heartfelt relief. “I have learnt the nobleness and generosity of your nature. I know my brother’s life *is* safe; you are a soldier and a gentleman—a murderer you cannot be.”

“You honour me too much;” he protested, with a sense of shame at his heart.

“I hold to my faith,” she answered, with thorough confidence.

“Well, well—as far as I dare promise——”

“I ask no pledge, Colonel Von Stettenheim. I will not bind you by a promise; better than all words, I have learnt the nobleness of your character. I came here broken-hearted, I go in peace.”

She turned to leave the room, drawing the mantilla close over her face. When they stood on equal terms, the superiority remained with her; could he deny the generosity which she had in her own nobleness of heart imputed to him?

“This girl absolutely makes a fool of me,” he muttered.

Before reaching the door, she turned, and with sudden impulse hurried up to him, and clasping his hand, pressed it to her lips!—many a shameless kiss, but this was a kiss of honour. Again she left him without uttering a word; she was about to enter the corridor, but at the threshold she uttered a cry of alarm, and once more flew to his side, clinging for protection to his arm.

“Save me, save me!” she cried, in agitated voice.

Baron Falkenberg, in a state of great excitement, followed by Grimani, hurried into the room.

“By all the saints, Stettenheim, it’s reported that that fellow Grimani is secreted in these very barracks.”

“It’s a fact, Colonel,” exclaimed Grimani, throwing back his cowl.

Colonel von Stettenheim considered that the presence of Baron Falkenberg was quite sufficient to account for Vittoria’s alarm.

CHAPTER V.

THE AUSTRIAN COLONEL INTERVENES.

VITTORIA regained her home in safety, her incognito preserved. She had been conducted to her gondola by Colonel von Stettenheim. As he led her down the long corridors she had clung to him in trepidation—the terror of Grimani's presence had converted him into a friend; strange, indeed, that she should thus cling for protection to the very man whose insult had occasioned all her woe. He was playing a deep game of finesse, and his natural *bonhomie* and his tone of high breeding and gallant bearing strengthened his hands. He treated her with the utmost respect; or,

rather, he exhibited towards her that easy, natural manner, marking perfect equality, with which a gentleman addresses a lady. He pressed her hand, and renewed his promise when she entered the gondola.

Well, he had promised that no harm should befall Marco, and he had saved her, unconsciously indeed, from the terrible consequences of discovery by her affianced husband: for these mercies at least her heart might justly beat with gratitude. She fell musing over that assuring expression of his handsome features, when he raised her from the ground, and declared that he would not betray her to Baron Falkenberg. What harm thus to muse? She was a Venetian, he was an Austrian; they were wide asunder as pole from pole—but harm or not, that expression of his face was graven on her memory. With musing came exultation; her beauty—and in their self-communings women do not deny the truth on that point—her commanding presence and stateliness, had manifestly had

their worth in the eyes of a man, who was said by popular report to be sated by woman's charms. She felt the triumph of the interview had been with her. But, alas, with exultation, and, indeed, through the very fervour of exultation, came rapid revulsion of feeling. As the vital force which had supported her during the ordeal of the interview gradually ebbed away, chill doubt took possession of her soul.

She had determined to see her brother in the morning before he left the house. Her painful anxiety would not allow her to close her eyes: she stole into Marco's room and watched him as he slept, and, fostered by the cold night air, the dead silence of the house, and her own bodily weakness and fatigue, the doubts assumed terrible proportions. All faith in Stettenheim's promise died away; the remembrance of his insulting gaze, and her own sickening feeling of shame, wholly veiled the bright impression of his countenance. The man was well known to be a reckless libertine, a despiser

of women and woman's honour, and she had been dreaming in her foolish fancy that she, a woman—and he must have met hundreds of women quite as fair—had touched that man's better feelings, and evoked generosity from a purely selfish heart. Her recent faith looked utterly futile and inadequate; she had been fool enough to trust her brother's life to this straw of hope; she had been contemptible enough in her miserable vanity, to rejoice in the thought of her own beauty, while her face ought to have burnt with the crimson of shame and a loathing sense of self-degradation.

A feeling of utter loneliness crept upon her. Hour by hour the great clock of St. Mark's Place announced the progress of the night. She must never reveal to a living soul the wild folly she had committed in risking an interview with the Austrian. Even Marco, who loved her best, would hate her, nay, almost kill her for that compromising act. "If some one would only love me," she murmured in her wretched-

ness, "even for a very short time, I could die happy." She tried to think of the mother she could scarcely recollect, but the thought was too vague for consolation. Love and help were far away in heaven—and in her weakness, gazing forth at the stars, heaven seemed very far away—too far for her poor, weak prayers to reach, and she felt too weak of soul even to frame a prayer. "Our Lady must come down and seek me; I cannot seek Her." Time dragged thus painfully through the night; at last the hour arrived at which Marco ought to be aroused. Pietro had had strict orders, but Pietro was snoring away in his distant chamber, with his lies and treachery for a pillow. Marco was sleeping soundly; so calmly and quietly, indeed, that he scarcely appeared to breathe. How could she awake him? What, her voice arouse him to meet death? Impossible! She hung over his pillow anxiously, waiting for Pietro to give the summons. As she gazed upon the sleeper, the quiet sleep seemed to grow still

more quiet, until it became in her distempered gaze as quiet as the sleep of death. He was lying on that bed, as he might lie there lifeless in the next short hour or two. She could bear the sight no longer; she must see him move; she must break the horrible spell. "Marco!" she cried; "dearest Marco!" He started at her voice, gazing on her in the dazed manner of awakened sleep; but she could not bear to speak to him. She fled to her own room, locked the door, and threw herself upon her bed.

It all passed like a dreadful nightmare. She tried not to listen, but her ears were very quick to hear—Pietro's shuffling step in the passage—Count Salvetti's arrival—Marco's step as he approached her room. "Farewell, darling sister, keep a good heart." She could not answer him. She heard his departing step, Count Salvetti's whispered tones, and a chill feeling at her heart told her they had left the house. How long she remained lying down, whether it was sleep or insensibility from exhaustion,

she could not tell. She regained her consciousness, and then some vague terror seemed to fill the room. She started from her bed, and hurried from her chamber into the great saloon; if haply she might find her father, even the harsh voice of chiding and rebuke, was better than the misery of solitude.

As she entered the saloon, the level rays of dawn were pouring through the window.

“ Oh, hateful sun ! ” she cried ; “ lighting the road to death. They meet on that very shore of the Lido where he and I have played together so often. Oh, Marco ! dearest Marco ! I would sell my heart’s blood to save your life, and yet I am forced to remain here in helpless agony and watch the dawn of this terrible day. Death seems to lurk about my footsteps. I must have some living being to cling to, some blessed word of comfort and support.”

Count Contarini presently entered the saloon ; he also had passed a sleepless night,

and, like his daughter, had been unable to summon courage to see Marco.

“ Oh, my father ! ” exclaimed Vittoria, as she approached him with a heart languishing for love and sympathy, but with timid, uncertain step.

He checked her approach with cold gesture.

“ Has he gone, Vittoria ? ”

“ He has,” she answered simply. “ I watched at his bedside all night ; he slept quite calmly. Count Salvetti came here at four o’clock ; they left together.”

“ Enough, Vittoria ; you can leave me.”

She lingered with a sorrowful, scared look.

“ You hear me,” he continued harshly. “ I wish to be alone.”

“ Oh, let me remain with you,” she exclaimed in beseeching tones. “ Chide me as you will, but do not drive me from your presence. Oh, not now ; now that the terrible moments have arrived ; now that, may be, they stand face to face. Oh, give me one word of sympathy.”

“Sympathy!” he answered. “How can I give you sympathy? You, the unfortunate cause of this misery.”

“Oh, but innocent,” she exclaimed.

“The cause, I say.”

“Have mercy! if you knew how dear he is to me, how much I love him.”

“Love him,” rejoined her father in a tone of contempt. “What can you do to show your love?”

What could she do? She had indeed done all she could—risked her fair repute, risked insult and even outrage, and in her utter hopelessness she felt the result was nought.

“Tell me,” continued her father, bitterly, “can your love for him turn this Austrian from his thirst for blood?”

“No, it cannot,” she answered in desponding tone; “it cannot; you are right. I can do nothing.” She shrunk away from him, but he allowed her to remain in the room: there was mercy at least in that; and awaiting the end for weal or woe, father and daughter sat in silence.

She felt they had returned long before voices were audible, but she lacked courage to move from her chair. At last her father caught the sound of voices.

“They have come back—it must be all over,” he exclaimed; and trembling with emotion, he rose from his chair. She flew to his side.

“That’s Count Salvetti’s voice,” she murmured, and advanced towards the door; but with a sudden access of terror she flew back to her father’s side, and clasped her hands over her face. How terrible might be the sight which would meet her eyes!

The door opened, Marco entered. “Vittoria!” he cried, and her brother stood before her without the slightest scratch of injury. With a shriek of joy she flew to meet him, but before she met him a new impulse flashed into her mind. She fell on her knees and burst into tears. Yes, the mercy she could not seek had come unsought. The unasked boon had been granted; not through the glow of faith and

the ardour of prayer, but amid anguish of heart and the chill of doubt and depression, the Mother of all Mercy had descended to her succour. "Oh, miracle wrought for me!" she exclaimed; "and I so faithless all the while. Oh, blessed Mary! pardon those wicked doubts, pardon these prayerless lips, pardon this dead faith." And then she arose and threw her arms round Marco's neck, and kissed him fervently. "Oh, Marco! this is a blessed end; back safe to us once more."

Brother and sister stood locked in one another's arms, while Count Contarini inquired of his son the particulars of the duel. Vittoria was so absorbed in the thought of her brother's safety, that for a while his narrative scarcely reached her ears; but her interest was suddenly aroused by the mention of Stettenheim's name.

"We stood face to face," said Marco.

"And how did he bear himself, this Austrian?" inquired Contarini.

"As we crossed our swords he seemed

nervous, strangely moved," answered Marco.

"Strangely moved!" exclaimed Vittoria, unconsciously disengaging herself from her brother's arms.

"To my surprise," continued Marco, "he appeared to lack all skill with his weapon; his guard was feeble."

"Feeble!" she echoed, with surprise.

"At the fourth thrust I broke through his guard."

"Well—yes," she cried, with intense interest.

"I wounded him."

"Wounded him!" she exclaimed, in a voice of anguish. "Wounded him!" and she shrunk away from Marco with a shudder.

"Yes, wounded him, I say. I drew that cursed Austrian blood."

"But not fatally, Marco, not fatally?"

"No, it was only his sword arm."

"Oh, Heaven be thanked!" she cried, with a sigh of relief. "Not fatally then—

not fatally?" she reiterated, with the deepest anxiety.

"A mere trifle, I tell you; but it stopped the duel." Marco was irritated by his sister's strange manner. "What is the meaning of this exhibition of emotion?"

"Nothing, nothing," she answered. "Your safety, Marco, your safety. Oh, if you knew how much I have suffered for your sake, you would forgive my weakness." But her anxiety required fresh assurance. "Not severely hurt, you say; only a slight wound?"

"Yes, I repeat, only a slight wound;" and Marco turned from her with impatient gesture.

"Don't be angry with me, Marco; I can't bear to think of blood being shed."

"You show strange tenderness for the few drops this Austrian bully has lost," exclaimed Count Contarini, in a tone of irritation and displeasure; and he marked his displeasure, by withdrawing with his son to another part of the chamber.

“Oh, precious blood!” she murmured; “blood of that noble heart which I have wronged with doubt. Ah, Colonel von Stettenheim, you have nobly kept your pledge.” And tears came into her eyes, and once more, and now undimmed by doubt, the recollection of that handsome face in all its nobleness of expression filled her mind. She felt, and the feeling was mingled with alarm, that this man, whose introduction to her had been through an insult, was intervening betwixt her heart and its old affections; that for the time, at least, he was standing between her heart and the brother she loved so well. This game of hearts was somewhat akin to a game of chess, when the game is played by opponents who are separated by distance. He had sworn to win her, and she little knew the skill and finesse of her antagonist; each move a deep calculation; yet on the whole the game was fairly matched, for with all his experience, he had yet to learn how strong a woman is in the strength of purity and innocence.

Without waiting for the usual signal, Grimani suddenly entered from the secret panel. He hurried up to Marco and laid his hand approvingly on the young man's shoulder.

“Bravely done, Marco. I know all that has occurred. You have upheld the honour of Venice. Worthy of his name,” he continued, addressing Contarini. “Worthy of his family, worthy of Italy.”

He then passed on to Vittoria, who, with the thought of the Austrian in her heart, trembled guiltily at his presence.

“Ah, Vittoria, I have kept my promise.”

“Kept your promise?” she exclaimed, scarcely for the moment understanding the significance of his words.

“Has Marco received any hurt?” he asked, in a low tone.

“No,” she answered.

“I have saved his life. Hush! it's as well to let that boy think that he conquered the Austrian; but it was I who held back Stettenheim's arm. I who paralysed his power and skill.”

“You ? ” she muttered involuntarily.

“I tell you I did it. I had awed Stettenheim with the threat of death. In abject fear he did not dare to strike. I knew the fellow was an arrant coward.”

“A coward, no ! ” she exclaimed, in all the fervour of her heart. She would have given worlds to have been able to vindicate the Colonel’s character from this mean aspersion ; but the expression on Grimani’s face gave her timely warning. “At least, the world declares that Colonel vot Stettenheim is a brave soldier,” she added, in timid apology.

“Let the world hold to that belief,” he answered, with a sneer. “We two at least know the truth.” He mistook her trepidation for coldness ; she was about to turn from him.

“Oh, Vittoria ! ” he exclaimed, reproachfully ; “have I not earned my reward ? Where is this affection so warmly promised ? ‘Oh, Carlo, if you save his life I shall love you so.’ I *have* saved his life, even at the

risk of my own. Does your heart make no response?" He might have kissed her, though the recollection of the Austrian flashed into her mind; but he sought a gift, and not a permission; he was too proud for that, and he entirely misunderstood the motive of her coldness.

"Still dead and cold," he muttered. "I understand; the old insult rankles in your bosom. That kiss still smarts upon the lips: be it so. I will win your proud heart with ample vengeance, be assured of that."

"No, no," she cried, in alarm; "not vengeance. I require no vengeance. I was foolishly excited at the time; besides, the insult is now atoned by blood."

"But not of my shedding," he answered. "No, Vittoria, I have been forced to stoop very low—to bend to meanness and deceit; but I have sworn *myself* to avenge that insult. This very night I shall keep my word. Enough now,—my visit here concerns your father and brother. Count

Contarini—Marco, I am the bearer of an important communication.”

“One moment,” exclaimed Marco; “I have forgotten to secure the door.”

“It is needless,” answered Grimani.

“But Pietro?”

“Have no fear,” continued Grimani. “Indeed, I need his presence: by your permission I will summon him;” and he struck on the hand bell.

“What does this mean?” inquired Contarini, with astonishment.

“It means that I dare once more be Count Grimani—that I dare cast off the spy’s disguise—that I dare face a treacherous cur like Pietro openly and without fear. I do this under the shelter of your roof—in a few hours more I shall be free to do it in the streets of Venice. Pietro comes.”

Pietro shuffled into the room; he gazed suspiciously around; when his eyes fell on Grimani, an expression of surprise and fear darted into his face. He edged backwards

towards the door, but the recollection that he had closed it on entering checked his movement.

“You rang, signor,” he said, addressing his master with evident alarm and distrust.

“That gentleman,” answered Contarini, pointing to Grimani, “requires your services.”

“Signor!” gasped Pietro, bowing to Grimani.

“My name is Count Grimani; you are well acquainted, I believe, with one Father Onofrio, a spy. Well, Pietro, Father Onofrio has kept his promise—ten thousand florins, Pietro—ten thousand florins!”

Pietro was thunderstruck for the moment. When he regained his senses he made a sudden dash towards the balcony, but Grimani covered him with a pistol.

“One inch further, Pietro, and you die.”

Vittoria averted her face, and Pietro, terror-stricken, fell on his knees, praying for mercy.

“Do not harm him!” pleaded Vittoria.

“Harm him, no!” answered Grimani. “He is reserved for a traitor’s death. Your help, Marco;” and the two men rushed on Pietro, forced handcuffs upon him, tied his legs, and thrust a gag into his mouth. “We are quite safe,” observed Grimani, with a dry chuckle, when the operation was satisfactorily concluded. “Falkenberg will leave us at peace; I’ve arranged matters with him. He is to wait for a signal from Pietro, so I fear his patience will be sorely tried. Now for my mission.”

“But the scoundrel can hear,” interposed Contarini.

“The sharper punishment,” answered Grimani, vindictively. “The knowledge he would have sold to the Austrians will be poured into his ears, but his reward will be death, not gold. I warned you yesterday, Contarini, to be prepared for a rising;” and then, turning proudly to his betrothed, “Ah, Vittoria, rejoice with me, the dagger is cast away; once more we may grasp the sword of honour. The Secret Society has

decreed a rising *en masse* against the Austrians this very night."

Her brother Marco, with the impetuosity of youth, cried, "Bravo, noble Italy—free and undivided!" And she, too, was in the very heyday of life's enthusiasm; but not a word of joy could she utter. Well, the prayer of her girlish heart, the long prayer of years, was answered at last. To-night, the post of danger might be hers—to-night, she might load the musket and pile the barricade, and seek the death she had coveted—her life-blood bravely shed for the love of Venice, and her soul at peace for evermore; but the thought which had risen between her and her brother and her betrothed, rose between her heart and her patriotism. Oh, bitter mockery of an earnest hope and a fervent prayer—an enemy, and, worst of all, an Austrian, had utterly paralyzed the great purpose of her life. She could only find words for protest.

"A rising *en masse*! Oh, useless bloodshed!"

“No,” replied Grimani; “Venice will be free!”

“Free! Crushed beneath the Austrian guns.”

“Have faith,” answered her betrothed, greatly marvelling at her expression of fear. “By to-morrow’s dawn the fleet of Italy will be at anchor in the waters of the Republic. In twenty-four hours Cialdini will enter Venice.”

“But the Austrian garrison?” she asked eagerly.

“Baron Falkenberg has delivered it into our hands. This evening he gives a grand entertainment to the Austrian generals and staff at the Café Quadri.”

“The Café Quadri?” she exclaimed with dismay, for she remembered Falkenberg’s invitation to Stettenheim.

“Yes, the Café Quadri. At a given signal we surround the house, and behold, in a moment, the brain of the Austrian force is paralysed. In default of leaders, the Croats and disaffected Hungarians will fall away like sheep.”

“But these officers will resist,” she urged with desperation.

“The worse for them,” rejoined Grimani, sternly. “They will die to a man.”

“To a man!” she echoed in blank despair.

“To a man!” reiterated Grimani. “The web is woven—none can escape.” He turned from her, and his manner shewed deep contempt. “Count Contarini,” he continued, “the Secret Society places you in command of the third section of the National force. Marco, you are entrusted with the fourth; the old instructions stand good. At a quarter to nine o’clock you must lounge into the Café Florian; the piazza will be gradually filled with a crowd of persons, as usual, languid with the day’s heat, eager to enjoy the cool evening breeze and the glorious moonlight; as the bell of St. Mark’s strikes the half-hour, this random crowd will become as if by magic an organized force. You will immediately assume your command.”

Undaunted by Grimani's contempt, Vittoria made a vain effort to divert her father from the enterprise.

"The scheme is so rash, so hopeless," she urged. "A terrible presentiment tells me it must fail."

Her father, though pained, merely attributed her words to woman's fear and weakness.

"I have sworn implicit obedience to the commands of the Secret Society; I must obey!" he answered decisively.

She then turned to her brother as a last hope.

"Dear Marco! do not go; the plot must end in utter failure—death to all concerned."

Marco was absolutely aghast at her words. She had, as a mere child, been the first to evoke his sense of patriotism. They had so often talked together of this coming combat. She had sworn to stand side by side with him, wherever danger was most threatening. He spoke to her with contempt, and almost abhorrence.

“You are strangely changed, Vittoria—in days past I have seen you weep, that, woman as you are, your arm was powerless to fight for Venice; and now you strive to turn us from the goal of freedom.”

But the severest rebuke came from Count Grimani.

“My old comrade, I pity you,” he exclaimed, addressing Contarini, “and you too, Marco. I had imaged a noble example in this daughter of your house,—courage—endurance—undying faith in the destinies of Venice. I dare not go forth to wrestle with death, bearing in my bosom the image of a craven heart. My hand will be powerless to strike, while burdened with this token of miserable cowardice.” He drew the ring of betrothal from his finger. “I cast it from me—henceforth we are strangers,” and he flung the ring to the ground.

The bond was broken between them. The disgrace and shame were hers; but mingled with the shame was the thought of the Austrian Colonel.

“Grimani!” protested Count Contarini, with astonishment and pride; and Marco’s blood fired up.

“Count Grimani, recollect she is my sister; this act of yours dishonours us and our family.”

Grimani answered the protest with calm deliberation. “Marco, condemn me if you will, but condemn me by the strength of your own conscience. You shall be Count Grimani for the nonce—pick up that ring, I say, place it on *your* finger, and then I will wear it on mine.”

Marco answered the challenge with a deep sigh. That sigh declared the freedom of her hand from henceforth, and it also sealed her shame in the eyes of father and brother. She cowered away and sank into a chair. She seemed to have forfeited the honours of her birthright, and yet the old enthusiasms still dwelt in her soul; but the thought of that man who had dealt so generously with her, lying murdered at the ghastly banquet, mastered every other feeling.

Pietro had to be disposed of before the departure of Grimani.

"I had almost forgotten that reptile," exclaimed Grimani; "he would be safely stowed in that *oubliette* beneath the lower corridor."

"How can he be conveyed there?" objected Contarini; "the people who inhabit the water story constantly pass to and fro."

"You must watch the entrance," exclaimed Grimani with ready suggestion. "Marco must contrive to raise the stone slab, we can then drag him down the panel stairs. I will watch here—quickly, time presses, I have many arrangements to effect ere night."

Marco and his father hastened to obey these directions; Grimani remained watching Pietro, who shivered with terror beneath his gaze. Nor was Vittoria less moved as she furtively regarded Grimani's hard, relentless features. She trembled to think what those hands of his were destined to do

that very evening. "If I could but warn Colonel von Stettenheim to stay away from this fearful banquet! No, a warning to him might raise a suspicion among the Austrians—a clue to the discovery of the plot. Alas! he must die; generous and noble as he is, his life must not weigh against the chances of this enterprise—a father's, a brother's life: he must die." She buried her face in her hands, and they were quickly wet with tears.

Marco hurried into the room. "Grimani!" he exclaimed, "I cannot raise the slab. I dare not call my father from his post."

"You watch here, I'll go," rejoined Grimani.

"One man's strength is not sufficient; the fastenings are rusted."

"I *must* try," persisted Grimani; "we dare not leave him here."

"It's useless for one man, I tell you."

"Then there's only one method left," exclaimed Grimani, cocking his pistol.

“Come, Pietro, short shrift and speedy death—prepare to die;” and Grimani pointed his pistol at the spy’s head.

“Hold!” exclaimed Vittoria, starting from her chair. “I will watch him.”

“You?” rejoined Grimani, in a tone of contempt.

“Yes, craven as I am,” she answered—“if he move, he dies. I have fired many a pistol; or, if need be, my fingers would grapple at his throat. Marco knows I’m strong enough.”

Grimani cast a glance at the miserable quivering old man lying helpless at his feet, handcuffed and bound; and then he turned to the woman whose hand he had discarded, and beheld her animated once more by all her grandeur and force.

There seemed no danger in confiding the charge, all-important as it was, to her keeping: Judith could have been trusted, and Vittoria inspired a like confidence—it was somewhat of an *amende*, too, for what had passed, for even in the hour of a great

enterprise, a man might well feel a regret at having thrown away such a pearl of womanhood.

“We can trust her,” exclaimed Marco, with confidence; but Grimani did not require any assurance: he placed the pistol in Vittoria’s hand, and, followed by Marco, left the room.

She stood for the moment irresolute—she then knelt at Pietro’s side, and drew the gag from his mouth.

“If you raise your voice you die,” she whispered. “Tell me how I can communicate with Colonel von Stettenheim?”

“I will be your messenger,” he muttered, gasping with the pain of the gag.

“Fool!” she exclaimed; “don’t trifle with me. I have saved your life now, if you are faithful I will strive to save it hereafter. How can I send a note to Colonel von Stettenheim?”

“At a wave of the hand a gondola will shoot beneath the balcony; drop your letter—it will be safely conveyed to the Colonel.”

“Enough,” she answered, and quickly seating herself at the writing-table, with the pistol laid close to her hand, and facing Pietro, so that the slightest movement on his part without detection was impossible, she wrote with rapid pen a note to the Austrian Colonel. She folded the letter hurriedly, and, melting the sealing-wax took up a large seal close at hand.

“Why, the crest will betray you,” muttered Pietro.

“True,” and she felt for a seal in her dress.

“There’s a ring on my finger,” suggested Pietro: he raised his handcuffed hands towards her and stretched out the finger which bore Falkenberg’s signet. In her anxiety she pressed the melted wax on the letter to Pietro’s proffered seal, and quickly concealed the letter in her bosom. Grimani and Marco re-entered the room immediately afterwards.

“I have not failed,” she exclaimed; I surrender my charge:” and she returned the pistol to Grimani.

“But the gag?” he asked.

“He was stifled; I removed it for the moment,” she answered. And then, as if to avoid any further conversation with Grimani, she retired to the balcony.

“Ah, you scoundrel!” exclaimed Grimani, seizing the gag; “I had forgotten that ring:” and he drew it from Pietro’s finger.

“You *had* forgotten it,” muttered Pietro, “but I hadn’t, brother spy.”

“Silence, you wretch!” and Grimani again thrust the gag into Pietro’s mouth.

“Now, Marco!” and Grimani and Marco dragged Pietro through the panel.

As soon as she was alone, Vittoria waved her hand from the balcony—a gondola, which was in waiting, quickly shot beneath: she threw down the letter, and staggered back into the room.

“Saved! saved!” she cried—“till all danger be over, he will be safe here with me.”

Colonel von Stettenheim had indeed calculated upon receiving a letter from Vittoria

Contarini; but he little witted how wonderfully fortune had favoured him—how kith and kin, and a strange force of circumstances had conspired together to place the woman he sought in his power.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT SHE WROTE, AND WHAT HE READ.

PIETRO had astutely believed, that the letter, bearing the impression of Baron Falkenberg's seal, would have been promptly conveyed to the police bureau—but the spy employed was not a man of quick perception. He had, moreover, been once snubbingly informed, by a petulant superior officer, as a reward for an act of *trop de zèle*, that he was not paid for thinking; thenceforward he had sulkily forsworn thought, and stuck to the letter of his instructions. He had been instructed to wait for a seal ring, and come what might, for a seal ring he did stolidly determine to wait. However,

as there was manifest profit to be made out of the delivery of a letter from a Venetian lady to an Austrian Colonel, the note was duly despatched to its destination by the hand of a friendly comrade; but with regard to Grimani's scheme for his own detection, Falkenberg waited impatiently for his ring, the spy waited impatiently for Pietro's signet, and Pietro, shivering with fear and cold, waited impatiently for deliverance from a dank and dark cell, covered by a neatly fitting stone slab. But although plots failed, the Colonel received his note safely, and paid handsomely for the delivery.

If the recollection of his countenance was impressed upon Vittoria's memory—the recollection of her beauty and grandeur of aspect was equally impressed upon his. Her recollection, however, was only vivid because it was associated with the thought of devotion and self-sacrifice, because the face of her memory bore the impress of a noble heart. But what mattered a woman's heart or soul to him? a woman's beauty

was all he cared for. Still, there was undoubtedly fresh zest in the thought that this Venetian girl, even as a suppliant, with her fair fame and honour wholly at his mercy, had dealt with him as no woman with the vantage ground on her own side had ever dealt before. She had clasped his hand and kissed it with fervour; she had clung to him with almost convulsive grasp,—but a strange spell seemed to clothe her with protection. The further she advanced in her fearless freedom, the further back did he feel constrained to retire. Of course he was ignorant of the full force of the motives by which she was actuated; but this ignorance only served to increase his marvel, and the more he thought the matter over, the more perplexed did he become. He fondly believed that he had succeeded in summing up the character of women, into two or three convenient cynical aphorisms; and behold, this Venetian girl afforded new experiences, which declined to dovetail with the old definitions. A good deal of mental

distress always arises when an old faith is shaken, when a dawning sense of fallibility shakes the old pride of infallibility. He smoked vigorously, but this aid to logic did not help to repair his shattered theories. He knew he might calculate upon her writing to him ; and if the old foundations of his philosophy had not been rudely disturbed, he could have anticipated, if not the very words, at least the purport of the expected letter.

His wound in the arm was not very painful, stiff rather than painful—he was a consummate master of his weapon, and it was as easy for him to receive Marco's thrust at a given point, as it would have been to have wounded Marco. He had certainly not miscalculated the value of this wound in the eyes of the woman he sought to win.

The letter arrived—his heart beat with curiosity and interest. Little witting the significance of the seal, he tore open the envelope and anxiously scanned the con-

tents. He could scarcely resist laughing—it was the old, old story; his cynical philosophy was reinstated, his new doubts entirely dissipated—behold, he had conquered again as he had conquered before—she had been to see him, she had seen him, she was vanquished. He had foolishly misconstrued her manner, mistaking an idiosyncrasy for a new factor in the philosophy of woman. But misconstruction was impossible now,—the letter prayed him to pay her a secret visit at nine o'clock in the evening, and then there was the postscript which contained the real pith of the letter—"my maid will admit you at the small door on the canal—we shall be alone—they will be away at the Café Florian." Ah, if he could but have guessed the trepidation with which those words were penned—the desperate fear lest he should hesitate to visit a Venetian house, unless his safety was amply assured. Well, the adventure had lost half its allurements in his eyes—if it had not been for the

triumph of winning a Venetian woman in the face of national hatred and deep-rooted antipathy—a triumph which no Austrian in the annals of love had yet enjoyed—he would have given up the adventure, and Vittoria might have waited in vain, for the coming of this *enfant gâté* of woman's smiles, as many a woman had been compelled to wait before.

Whilst he thought of her with light contempt and linked her name with degradation, she was praying to Heaven for his life with earnest prayer. She had racked her brain to devise some plan for his escape from the coming carnage—she had prepared a disguise and secreted it in her own chamber. There was desperate risk in all this—but beyond the risk there was something still more terrible—shame and humiliation. She had been forced to make her own waiting-woman a confidant. Not a confidant in the truth—to have revealed the truth with all its generous and noble intention to this woman, would have been

to endanger not only the life of father and brother, but the very success of the plot. It was a confidence necessarily involving a declaration of infamy—the words were wrung out of her mouth half unawares; their full purport was only revealed to her by the woman's surprised and significant look. "What," said the woman, "an Austrian officer conveyed secretly into the house, and she was to watch lest they should be disturbed." Vittoria beheld with sickening feeling the damning inference written in the woman's face—the woman's smile growing into a hideous leer—and the blood of outraged modesty mantled her face, and shuddering with a supreme sense of shame, her lips sealed against all power of refutation, she well-nigh faltered in her generous project. But her innocence and her purity upheld her. In her own conscience she stood acquitted of all evil, and the generosity of her heart rebuked her, that in the fear of *false* shame she should allow the man, who had risked his life for

her sake, to be cruelly murdered. So she silently accepted the imputation of disgrace, and delivered over her fair fame to the woman to deal with scornfully, and she bought the woman's fidelity by the gift of the few jewels she possessed. Thus on the very day which should have been the triumph of her life, when pride, and honour, and patriotism should have upheld her in a glorious struggle for Venetian freedom, that day was a day of shame and humiliation and self-sacrifice, and this sore abasement was endured for the sake of a man who was lolling at his ease, and amid whiffs of smoke and cynical thoughts, triumphantly exulting in the thought of her degradation.

CHAPTER VII.

GRIMANI FORGETS VENICE.

It was Grimani's purpose not to lose sight of Falkenberg until he had seen him fully installed in his duties of host at the Café Quadri. There was a certain inconvenience in this course, inasmuch as Grimani's presence was required at fifty other points of difficulty; still, the paramount necessity of watching Falkenberg's movements outweighed every other consideration. So Grimani, in his Franciscan garb, sat, as was his wont, in the Baron's bureau and watched with sarcastic exultation, the irritation and petulance of his Austrian employer. Falkenberg's anxiety would not allow of his sitting; he paced up and down

the chamber with a nervous hurried step. There was something particularly fascinating to Grimani, in the thought that he was insensibly leading his antagonist to his doom,—that the required signal lay safely secreted in his own pocket, within a few yards of Falkenberg's eager clutch. Falkenberg was fast attaining a mood with which it was dangerous to trifle—ever and anon he turned savagely on Grimani—he was beginning to lose his faith in the new spy, and indeed nothing but Grimani's calm impassioned manner prevented him from giving vent to his fury.

Grimani treated the Austrian as if he had been a fractious child.

“Have a little patience, can't you?—I have sworn, and I swear again, that this evening you shall meet Grimani face to face.”

“You've sworn that fifty times,” was Falkenberg's rejoinder.

“Is the oath broken yet?” asked Grimani calmly.

“Has my signet ring arrived—the signal you promised?”

“Am I Pietro?”

“Don’t bandy words with me,” exclaimed Falkenberg, giving way at last to his anger. “I begin to suspect your honesty and good faith—we two don’t part company until Grimani is secured.”

“My word on that,” answered Grimani quietly.

“Your word! I’ll have better security,” and Falkenberg struck his bell. An usher entered.

“Let that man be secured—handcuffs!” and Falkenberg pointed to Grimani. The usher gave a signal, and two of the secret police entered the room.

“Handcuffs!” cried Grimani with a scornful laugh. “What! handcuffs for a man who is forced to cling to you for very life?”

“Handcuffs,” answered Falkenberg, “because it’s death, not life, if you are false.”

“Then handcuffs by all means, if you

want that assurance," and with an air of bravado Grimani thrust his hands forward to the man who approached him, and allowed the irons to be placed on his wrists without the slightest resistance.

"So far good," continued Falkenberg; "if we secure Grimani this evening, you shall receive the ten thousand florins and my apology,—if not, then at twelve o'clock a file of soldiers and death as a spy."

"I accept the terms," answered Grimani; "we shall all find death a sure paymaster," and he threw himself defiantly into a chair.

Colonel von Stettenheim was announced. He entered the room in a bright jaunty manner. He was dressed, as of course the occasion required, in full uniform, and right handsome did he look, with a buoyant smile of triumph lighting up his features. His right arm was carried in a sling, but it was evident from the free use he made of his arm, that the sling was scarcely needful.

"Delighted to see you," exclaimed Falk-

enberg, assuming a cheerful air; "punctuality itself. "I shall be at your service in a few minutes."

"I regret to say, Baron, that I have only kept my engagement to break it."

"What's this mystery?" inquired Falkenberg.

"You must excuse my joining your party this evening."

"But you were undoubtedly engaged to me, Colonel?"

"The fact is,"—said Stettenheim with a smile.

"Come, come, no excuses about prior engagements——"

"I can't in honour say it was a prior engagement," rejoined Stettenheim significantly.

"Well then," answered Falkenberg, "you belong to me; I claim you against the world."

"But not against a lady—I must be frank with you, a lady has commanded my presence this evening."

“A trifle of that sort to weigh against a supper with good friends?”

“Well, Falkenberg, you know I’m not given to bravado, but I will boast now—a Venetian lady has commanded my presence.”

Grimani was listening intently to the conversation, though to outward appearance absorbed in his own thoughts; he started up from his chair at Stettenheim’s last words.

“A Venetian lady command the presence of an Austrian! impossible!” exclaimed Falkenberg.

“I tell you, the lady is a proud Venetian, and a violent patriot to boot,—hates Austria as only women can hate.”

“A strange story!” muttered Falkenberg, incredulously.

“My word for it,” rejoined Stettenheim.

“Your word is amply sufficient,” rejoined Falkenberg, courteously. “But in very faith, Colonel, I should have doubted my own eyes even if they had read the invitation.”

“Pshaw! I have the note here,” and Stettenheim, drawing Vittoria’s letter from his uniform, waved it with exultation.

A sickening feeling of dire presentiment stole over Grimani as he watched the Austrian Colonel.

“And what does the fair lady say?” inquired Falkenberg with an affected air of gallantry. He felt, indeed, no interest in the love side of the question, but all intelligence concerning the Venetians served for fish in the police net.

“The usual sort of letter,” answered Stettenheim; “vehement words which admit of but one construction,” and taking the letter from the envelope, he glanced over it with an air of triumph.

“And the fair one’s name?” asked Falkenberg, “if I may be pardoned for such curiosity.”

“The name is sacred,” rejoined Stettenheim curtly; “the name is for me alone.”

Falkenberg accepted the rebuke with a bow of acquiescence.

“Behold how love triumphs where statesmen fail,” exclaimed Stettenheim in a tone of banter. “No statesmanship could have placed me *en rapport* with a fair Venetian.—Change your policy, Falkenberg; convert your spies into lovers, and you’ll learn every secret.” He turned at the moment and caught sight of Grimani. “For instance, your grim Franciscan yonder—dress him up for a lover!—What! in durance vile, my man?—but I never meddle with affairs of state,” and turning again to Falkenberg, “Come, if I can’t give you names, I may at least describe form and face.”

“I shall be delighted,” exclaimed Falkenberg, and he gave a secret sign to Grimani to listen—but Grimani required no such injunction.

“By my soul,” continued Stettenheim, “it’s hard to find words when you want to describe a woman’s face. Do you care for pictures, Falkenberg?”

“So, so,” replied Falkenberg, with a

shrug of the shoulders. "I can't say I'm a connoisseur."

" 'So, so,' is about the limit of my artistic knowledge," rejoined Stettenheim; "but I do care for lovely faces—those old Venetians had the knack of painting. Gad, sir, they could paint flesh and blood and give it the breath of life! When I've looked at their women on the canvas, I've always said to myself *that* loveliness must once have been a reality, and not a mere creature of brush and palette. Well, the old art has died out, they say; but the chain of beauty can't be broken. Depend upon it, I've argued, they are somewhere hidden away, those fair faces and those splendid forms, somewhere in those musty old palaces with their pride, and their poverty, and their patriotism. Egad, I was right! Last evening one of these Venetian beauties stood before me, a living woman, as she might have stood before Titian's easel in the old days—golden hair, and the grand eyes, and the pride of noble birth. It's a return visit this even-

ing, Falkenberg! give me your congratulations. Bless me, what's come to the monk?" he exclaimed, as his eye fell on Grimani.

Grimani had sunk to his knees, his wrists were spasmodically grinding at the iron fetters, big drops of sweat stood on his brow—his appearance was, in short, that of a man in a fit; but the cause was overwhelming emotion, which could find no vent in action, and it well-nigh strangled him. The envelope of Vittoria's letter had fallen to the floor, and Grimani had beheld what in his eyes was the damning proof of Vittoria's shame, and the terrible explanation of her strange conduct—the girl's betrayer stood before him, and his hands were powerless to strike the blow of vengeance.

"You had better have the fellow looked to, Falkenberg," observed Stettenheim in kindly tone.

"He'll come to presently," rejoined Falkenberg with careless unconcern. "By the way, you mustn't do me the injustice of

supposing that I asked the lady's name out of mere curiosity—but remember, there are such things as snares for fine birds."

"I have perfect faith in the lady's sincerity," rejoined Stettenheim.

"Well, keep this charming engagement, by all means; but, at least, give such information as will enable me, under all chances, to provide for your safety."

"My safety is my sword," replied Stettenheim with proud confidence; "but stronger than all weapons, my safety is a woman's love. Farewell, Baron; a thousand apologies for a broken engagement."

As Stettenheim left the room, Grimani struggled to his feet, and almost involuntarily strove to follow the Colonel; his movement was arrested by Falkenberg.

"What's the game you are playing now?" he asked suspiciously.

"Game!" cried Grimani, struggling for utterance. "Game of life! surround the Palazzo Contarini—quick! no time to be lost. Smash in the doors; it's life or death."

“Heyday, man, has the signal arrived?” exclaimed Falkenberg, surprised by this sudden outburst.

“A man’s life,” rejoined Grimani hoarsely—his self-possession had deserted him, and he scarcely knew what he was saying in the terrible fear that possessed him.

“What does the man mean?” asked Falkenberg, somewhat bewildered.

“It’s a snare—that letter to Colonel von Stettenheim,” gasped Grimani.

“The lady’s name?” demanded Falkenberg.

Grimani hesitated for a moment—but he was forced to reveal the truth and all its shame.

“Vittoria Contarini—I know the handwriting,” and he gave the envelope to Falkenberg.

Falkenberg glanced at it for a moment, and fell into a coarse laugh, which pierced Grimani to the quick.

“What, the girl our gallant Colonel kissed the other evening? Impossible!”

“I tell you it’s the truth,” and Grimani writhed as he uttered the words. “No time to be lost, I say—surround the house. The man will be murdered by the Contarini; it’s a lure and snare out of vengeance for that insult.”

“We must be calm, Onofrio,” observed Falkenberg quietly. “At least, I must be so, for your head seems to have entirely deserted you. You appear to take a vast deal of interest in Colonel von Stettenheim,” and indeed Falkenberg was very greatly perplexed as to the cause of Grimani’s emotion.

“Can’t you see—don’t you understand?” urged Grimani, almost driven to his wit’s end, and speaking with rapid utterance—“they will all be at home now—Grimani will be there, he is her betrothed—depend upon it, he has his part to play in this vengeance—throw your net quickly, and catch them all.”

“So, your theory is that that letter is a snare;” and Falkenberg deliberately weighed

the question in his mind. "Of course, if your theory be correct, a rapid cast of the net, and we do secure the cursed brood."

"I'll lead the men," cried Grimani panting with anxiety—"there's a secret panel—a panel passage to the great saloon—let them hold a pistol to my head,—shoot me, if I fail."

"That word 'fail,' is an awkward word," rejoined Falkenberg quietly, "you see if I accept your proposal, I should run the chance of losing you, and not gaining Grimani—a double loss. No, on mature consideration, I elect to wait for Pietro's signal—it's always dangerous to alter a scheme in the midst of its execution. Patience, Onofrio, patience! You see, having regard to the Colonel's confident manner, I don't think we have any just cause for assuming the existence of a snare. It seems to me far more reasonable to admit the perfect good faith of the lady in question—remember, she has already visited the Colonel in his quarters—indeed, the

probabilities are manifestly in favour of a period having been carefully selected for this interview, during which the various members of the family would be absent from home. I see by your impatient manner that you don't accept my argument—I am sorry for it—reason is on my side, warped judgment, I don't know what or how, on yours." And Falkenberg authoritatively closed the discussion.

In his agony of impotence, and every word that Falkenberg had uttered was a stab, Grimani's senses seemed to fail him; his plausibility and ingenuity of device and suggestion, to which he had ere this trusted so implicitly for safety, had entirely deserted him—his brain was maddened by jealousy, and rage, and horrible apprehension—he grovelled helplessly at Falkenberg's feet, and begged and prayed in incoherent words, that the Palazzo Contarini might be instantly surrounded, broken into, searched.

So on the very threshold of a great enterprise, at the very hour which bore full

promise of the realization of a great hope, and the all absorbing purpose of a life,—was Grimani vanquished and cast down by the overwhelming powers of love. Falkenberg, in his heartless way, had pity for him—he attributed his strange conduct to the failure of courage at the close approach of death.

It was now full time for the Baron to repair to the Café Quadri, and receive his guests. He summoned his deputy, and gave implicit injunctions for immediate attention to be paid to Pietro's signal on its arrival, and he also ordered Grimani to be detained and closely watched, by two of the most trusty members of the secret police. “I shall return, Onofrio, at a quarter to twelve o'clock—pray Heaven I may be able to give you good quittance.” Falkenberg departed with the envelope of Vittoria's letter in his pocket, and the purpose in his mind of diverting his guests, the comrades of Stettenheim, with a pleasant tale of scandal, and all its conco-

mitants of light laughter and jeers, and coarse badinage; it was in truth the very story, to lend zest to the sparkle of champagne, and give brightness and animation to a feast of men.

As soon as Falkenberg had left, Grimani strove with intense effort to regain the due balance of his mind—to search for that happy expedient, which at other periods of danger had been ever wont to flash into his mind unsought, but his burning heart had dried up the old sources of inspiration. He tried to bribe the two men who guarded him, but it was all in vain—they utterly scouted his offers, in truth how should a miserable spy be able to pay in gold?

One last desperate chance remained—the chance of life or death—gold was powerless, but fear might be potent. He ordered the men who watched him to close the doors with care—not a soul other than themselves must hear what he was about to reveal—he spoke in such a voice of command, that they involuntarily obeyed him. They drew close to him to listen to his words.

“You scoundrels!” he cried,—“false sons of Venice as you are, here’s gold for you, ten thousand florins!”

“Where?” they asked with a jeer, thinking his brain was touched.

“Here, fools—in your grasp—tear the beard from my face, and you’ll find it.” They fell back from him covering him with their revolvers—handcuffed as he was, they were awed by his desperate looks. He suddenly tore the monk’s beard from his chin, and the false-shaven crown from his head. They started in terror when they beheld his natural countenance.

“You curs, you may well slink away,—I am Count Grimani, head of the Secret Society in Venice!” He looked at the men with his keen searching eyes, their eyes cowered beneath the force of his—he felt he had gained his point.

“Seize me, take the money—and *die* to-morrow—remember whoever injures me—aye, but a hair of my head—there are fifty daggers sworn to the work of vengeance—

go where you will, this earth is broad enough, but the daggers will travel till they reach your hearts, England, America, Australia, where you will." The men stood silent and irresolute.

"Make your choice quickly,—my freedom, or gold and sure death. In another minute I shall shout aloud that Count Grimani is in this room—it will be your death warrant when I do."

The men were utterly cowed by Grimani's dauntless bearing, and the terror of his threat.

"I give you one minute to decide—watch the clock."

There was a dead silence in the room.

One of the men stepped forward, threw down his revolver, and unclasped the handcuffs. Grimani was free !

CHAPTER VIII.

VITTORIA'S TRIUMPH.

THE outcome of a few faltering syllables may form the shaping of a life—the supreme moment may steal upon us unawares and unsuspected; nay, the mere inflexions of a voice, may seal a future for weal or woe—not in power and strength, but like a thief in the night, in the midst of depression, and weakness, and doubt, that moment may arrive. And then too, we may have greatly erred as to the venue of our battle—we may have carefully surveyed all the probable localities, and raised sure ramparts and a strong citadel of refuge, and lo! the attack falls on the very points that lack all defence

—the open country, without a foot of vantage, and worse even than this, the citadel may have been already mined and captured, while our best forces are striving desperately to hold the outer lines.

As we have seen, the anticipated battle ground of Vittoria's life, had been the battle ground of Venetian freedom; and woman as she was, she had armed herself at all points for this work, but she was not destined to fight that fight, and yet, strangely enough, the fight she had to fight was to be fought at the very time, when she believed that the fortunes of Venice were in the scale. Further than this, although she knew it not, her heart had been already vanquished by the Austrian Colonel—her reason said No—her reason utterly scouted any idea of the sort, her reason said the man was naught to her—he was an Austrian, he belonged to the hated race—the act she proposed doing was an act of pure generosity, the mere payment of a debt it would be base to leave unpaid—a life saved, for a

life given. It is true her reason did not assert itself very loudly, she was too weak and weary to reflect much—it was ordained that the supreme moment of her life should come upon her in the midst of weariness, and weakness, and doubt, and self reproach. Still her early training had not left her without some valuable resources—the subtle power she possessed of concealing her feelings and emotion, was destined to stand her in good stead, to give her a few precious minutes of breathing time and delay, when every minute would be to her the worth of a king's ransom. And finally she was armed with the splendid talisman of purity and innocence—thrice armed, and fearless in that power, of all fear of petty prudery.

What dress to wear? the thought of dress was very sickening, amid the thoughts of death and coming carnage, and yet the query had to be answered—the part *must* be played out, the part of a lady sitting as of ordinary custom, in her own drawing-room on a summer evening. Marietta exulted

in her task of tire woman, the thought of her mistress's degradation, was a pleasant apology for many sore and secret sins of her own. She had drawn forth from the old carved and richly painted coffers, bridal gifts of olden times, costly dresses which became her mistress bravely—rich old silks (those old Venetian fabrics were not woven for one generation) reformed and adapted to modern fashion. Vittoria turned from these dresses with loathing—"a white dress, Marietta—a white dress, I say, quite plain." The woman wondered much at such a selection. Vittoria closed her eyes as she sat before the glass, while the woman dressed her hair—it was positive torture to catch Marietta's glances, torture, too, the dreadful time Marietta lingered over her work. She could endure it no longer, she hastily dismissed the woman and burst into tears. "Heaven help me," she murmured, "I can't go on with it, it will kill me.—Marco's gone, and I scarcely kissed him, and my father—shall I ever see them

again ? alas ! they hate and despise me now." Her eyes fell on the clock, it was already ten minutes to nine. "He may arrive at any moment," she exclaimed in alarm, "and I'm not ready—these tears will betray everything." She hastily recalled Marietta, and bade her finish quickly, and she sat down before the glass, and again closed her eyes. When Marietta had finished the task, she glanced at herself in the glass, and felt with dismay that her hair had never been more deftly dressed—that her eyes were more than ever bright, through the pallor of her countenance and the dark lines of languor. Marietta had insidiously plaited a ribbon of Austrian colour into her hair. Her face flushed with indignation when she saw it, "how dare you, Marietta ? take out the wretched thing ! no, no, let it stay—the ribbon is rightly placed—it tells the truth—I'm false now to Venice."

She entered the great saloon, and dismissed Marietta to watch below. Bright

moonlight streamed into the room; it was a lovely calm evening, all sounds were hushed, and the city seemed buried in profound repose—an evening of balmy warmth not sultry heat, an evening made for peace and peaceful thoughts,—and the breathing of lover's vows, and those communings of love when silence itself is eloquence. It was strange to gaze on the moonbeams lying on the still waters, and then think of the fierce throbbing of men's pulses, and the fiery thoughts of men's minds—the peace which nature had proclaimed so lovingly, and the fierce strife which men were about to commence. These thoughts passed for a few moments through her mind,—but not the loveliness of Venetian moonlight, nor the majesty of grand old buildings, lighted by that tender light which covers decadence with silver beauty, or relegates it to the merciful keeping of dark shadow—but the progress of minutes on the dial, and the swinging of the pendulum held her mind enthralled.

The great bell of the piazza had struck the hour of nine but he had not come—her heart throbbed with each tick of the clock on the chimney piece, and direful thoughts beset her. What if her letter had failed in reaching its destination? What if the words of her letter had failed in effecting their purpose? And the terrible vision rose before her—cruel slaughter, and eyes closed in death. “Oh, God,” she cried in her despair, “he will not come; but the precious minutes, his very life blood, hurry away, and then comes death. Oh, horrible thought, in half an hour the fearful work begins. Grimani has sworn that I shall be avenged, and I know too well the strength of that man’s hard relentless nature. Oh, dull words of that letter, weak miserable words which have failed to turn him from his doom! What, could the burning fervour of a heart, coin no stronger phrases than those I wrote? Lost! murdered through the coldness of my warning words. Oh, he must not die. He shall not die. I

will not bear the burden of his generosity on my soul. Shall he give me a life, and I give him nothing in return? Risk nothing to save him from a miserable death? No, no, I'll go and drag him yet from that slaughter-house. He shall give heed to my anxious words." Alas! the danger of going to that Café Quadri, the favoured haunt of the Austrian officers, the fearful risk and danger—but she resolved to face it. She turned from the chimney piece for the purpose of ringing the bell on the table to summon Marietta. Stettenheim had entered the room noiselessly and stood before her. She started with surprise and emotion.

"Fair lady, I have obeyed your charming summons."

"Oh, Heaven be praised," she murmured in fervent tone. "At last! I feared the letter had failed—I was—I——" The intensity of her feelings, and her physical weakness overcame her—her eyes for a few moments lost their power of vision, she tottered towards him with purposeless gait,

and would have fallen, if he had not hurried forward and supported her with his arm—her head fell back on his shoulder and the golden hair brushed his lips. Her reception and her few words of greeting presaged in his judgment an easy victory—far too easy in truth to render victory a triumph, and as he supported her in his arms, notwithstanding her wealth of beauty, he despised her.

“One moment,” she murmured—“I shall be myself again directly. I’m so ashamed of such foolish weakness—I’ve been so anxious to see you. It’s all past now”—as she regained her strength and self-possession she gradually disengaged herself from his support, and drawing back, she addressed him in ordinary tones, and her manner became cold and constrained, in comparison with the fervour of her greeting, but with his experience of women he was perfectly prepared for this change of demeanour.

“Colonel von Stettenheim, I have ven-

tured to request this interview with you. I know that you, at least, will not misunderstand my motives—a sister desires to acknowledge her gratitude for a brother's life."

"Pray let that painful subject be forgotten," he answered.

"Oh, how can I ever forget it?"

"Nay, I pray you——" he exclaimed in voice of expostulation.

"Can I ever forget the cost of this generosity?" she asked. "That wound, alas!"

"A mere chance scratch, I assure you. Not worth a thought."

"Those light words will not deceive me," she rejoined in heartfelt tones, "your arm is in a sling."

"It was needless," he rejoined; "but our regimental surgeon is an old woman. You see I can use my arm perfectly." In a jaunty manner he removed his arm from the sling, and moved it to and fro, but he was careful to let an expression of pain

mark his face, and escape from his lips. His well-calculated deceit was amply rewarded—Vittoria's countenance responded with truest tenderness and sympathy, and tears started into her eyes.

“Oh no, no,—it gives you sad pain, I'm sure it does. Oh, let me—let me——” She took his arm, and with soft sympathetic touch replaced it in the sling—she clasped his hand awhile. “Oh, merciful hand which held back the deadly sword. I can never requite this noble act.”

“Tell me,” he asked, “does your father—your brother, know ought of the truth?”

“How should I dare to tell them? If they knew it, if they even suspected it,—I should be utterly lost.”

“They hate me then, as they hate all my race?”

“Alas!” she answered with sorrowful expression.

“And yet you have ventured to ask me here—to this mansion of your family—where I am regarded as a deadly enemy.”

She thought he looked around him with an air of distrust.

“Oh, have no fear,” she cried in assuring tone. “Think you I would let one hair of your head be injured?—my life first!—They are all away,” she continued with still greater emphasis—“away in the city. They will not return for a long time. Oh, have no fear. My maid, my own foster-sister, watches at the entrance below. You *know* you can trust in me.”

Her feelings from the first moment of the interview, had seemed so pronounced in his favour, that he deemed it the surer course to allow the wooing to come from her, but the earnestness of her last words, and the half assuring and half reproachful expression of her eyes seemed like a challenge to his gallantry. He answered her in far warmer tones than he had yet ventured to employ. “Oh, sweet girl! it needs no words—no assurance, save the earnest gaze of those dark eyes—I *can* trust in you. By my faith, this meeting is charmingly de-

vised. Shame on me to have dreamt of danger! Here in my lady's bower lives love not fear."

His manner alarmed her, and she started back. "Love," she answered, "don't talk of such an absurdity—it's a great wonder for us to be even friends—recollect I am a Venetian—you are an Austrian——"

"Oh, sweet lady," he cried passionately. "Love's country is the world! bound and barrier sink beneath his sway. Why, sweet one, those snowy Alps would melt in his fervent glow. At this hour Austria and Venice are dead to us—naught lives, but a lover and the lady of his love—the theft of that evening must be the happy gift of this. Dearest girl——" Her heart beat with terror, she could scarcely drag herself away—he seized her hand, and for the moment she lacked the power to wrench it from his grasp.

"Why, how now!" he exclaimed—"this hand—it almost freezes in mine. Why, sweet one, 'tis you who are afraid. Oh,

folly of fear! am I not at your side? A lover and a slave!—still so coy?”

With violent effort she broke away from him, her voice was almost choked with agitation. “Colonel von Stettenheim, this strange language: Oh, if you knew how these words pain me——”

Her indignant protest did not daunt him—“a woman’s coyness,” he thought—it had stood in his path many a time ere this, and many a time had he vanquished it.

“Why, sweet one,” he urged passionately—“none can hear us. I breathe these words in your ear, words for you alone. Why do you tremble? Think you this still calm night has hushed away all sound to play the eavesdropper? Oh, don’t let foolish fear break in upon this happy hour.”

“For mercy’s sake!” she cried, “cease—cease, you have fearfully misunderstood my motives,” tears filled her eyes. “I do not deserve this insult at your hands.”

Her manner told him that she was ani-

mated by a stronger feeling than mere coyness.

“An insult,” he answered in a tone of affected surprise—“have you forgotten that letter praying me to come here at this hour of the evening?”

“Had I not good cause for writing it?” she answered quickly. “Is every hour of the day at my free disposal?”

“And your eager warm reception,” he continued. “Why your very heart belies these strange cold words—when I entered, it well nigh led you captive to my arms.”

“I was indeed deeply moved,” she replied. “Is it a small thing for a sister to meet the man who has given her a brother’s life?”

“But those luring words,” he urged—“‘they are away, away in the city’—‘they will not return’—‘my maid watches below.’”

“Would you as an Austrian,” she asked in reply, “have dared to enter this house without a complete assurance of your safety?”

He was perplexed and annoyed, and at the same time bewildered by her conduct—but having gained the citadel, it was absolutely too absurd, to be baffled at the very moment of victory by a girl's fear and hesitation.

"Pshaw!" he cried, "this is folly—we dally with rapid time. Oh, Vittoria, the golden moments glide away——" he advanced towards her.

"Do not approach me, one cry of mine——"

"One cry," he answered; "why, foolish girl, you dare not raise your voice."

"You are right," she answered scornfully, "I dare not."

"The vantage ground is mine," he cried with passion—"shall a lover forego his triumph? If you raise your voice you are lost."

He was resolute enough, the thought of a hundred gibes from comrades' lips was urging him on—but he fairly recoiled before her burst of indignation, and the scorn

which flashed from her eyes. "Lost!" she cried, and instead of shrinking away, she advanced towards him with an expression of defiance and contempt. "Lost! oh, worthy boast! What, conqueror of a woman's confidence? Victor of a woman's faith? Is this the measure of Austrian chivalry? Is this the treatment that Austrian ladies receive from Austrian gentlemen—are they such scum, your countrywomen, that they endure insults and abasement like this?—women, without the dignity of womanhood, and men, without honour or shame?" She saw he flinched beneath her words, and she revelled for the moment in her triumph. "Be it so! shatter the idol I have raised in my own heart—show me the cowardice and brute force which lie at the core of this broken image—But remember, if I am lost—*your* life pays the forfeit."

She sought for more words of indignation—more coals of fire to heap on his head—it was needless, Colonel von Stettenheim wisely refrained from all rejoinder. Easy

enough in the heat of passionate indignation, to forget the misery of her position, but when she turned away from the aggressor, she turned to a great blank, and an aching void—a bright ideal had been destroyed, and a devoted purpose had met with a base requital, but her sense of utter loneliness constituted the deepest pain. Neither father, nor brother, nor Venice from henceforth to fill her heart,—and the one desperate thought of new love which had forced itself into her mind, had ended in insult and disgrace; she knew this Austrian must despise her, and that thought was insupportable to her woman's pride. She threw herself into a chair and burst into tears. “I had little thought of fearing you,” she murmured in mournful tones which touched his heart—“I had pictured to myself a soldier and an enemy—but an enemy brave and generous—I believed I had good cause for such a faith—Through this weary day, I have thought of Chevalier Bayard, ‘*sans peur et sans reproche*.’ I knew that woman's

honour had been sacred in his hands. I had not thought that a sister's gratitude meant a sister's degradation." To his honour be it said, he felt that he had deeply erred—worse than an error even, he had made a serious blunder—his contempt had now given place to admiration—for the first time in his life he had met with a woman *worth* loving—but the evil path he had chosen, had led him too far astray to give any present hope of reconciliation, his wisest course was manifestly an immediate withdrawal, together with the best *amende* his tongue could frame.

“Madam, I pray your pardon for any random words I may have unfortunately uttered. Believe me, I would not for worlds merit your contempt. I have deeply erred, and I dare not ask for forgiveness. I can only express my sincere regret for the pain I have caused you. I will no longer intrude my presence here. No living soul knows of this visit, and none shall ever know, be assured of that. Your honour *is* sacred in

my hands. One moment,—Maximilian von Stettenheim avows that he is not ‘*sans reproche*,’ but remember, if you ever need his service, he is your friend to death. My gondola waits below. Farewell.”

She could not bear to look at him, she kept her face closely buried in her hands while he spoke—but the frank earnestness of his voice, brought back the bright recollection of his countenance vividly into her mind, and with it the thought of his imminent peril. That word “Farewell,” sounded like a knell in her ears. “‘Farewell,’ oh, merciful Heaven, that word means death—death!”—and the recent insult, shameful as it was, paled away in the presence of that awful thought—she had lured him to the place of refuge, and now she was allowing him to go straightway to that slaughter-house.

He had picked up his military cloak, which he had flung off on entering the room, he had adjusted it, and was already standing on the threshold. She started up,

and brushing aside her golden hair which had fallen dishevelled over her face, she advanced towards him.

“Colonel von Stettenheim!”

“Madam,” he replied, with a bow of marked politeness.

“One moment,” she gasped—“I have something I wish to say—something—” Oh for thoughts, words—the shaping of some plausible excuse! but her mind was a hopeless blank.

“I am at your service, madam.”

“It was nothing,” she stammered—“it has escaped my memory for the moment—I shall remember it directly.”

“You must not think me ungallant if I am guilty of saying that time somewhat presses with me—I have a special engagement.”

“An engagement!” she echoed mechanically.

“The truth is, I sup with Baron Falkenberg this evening.”

“You sup with Baron Falkenberg!” she exclaimed with a shudder.

“Again, madam, farewell;” and with a courtly bow he turned towards the door.

“You cannot go!” she exclaimed with vehemence.

“An engagement,” he protested—he had reached the door. She flew up to him and grasped his hand—“No, no; you cannot go,” she cried in a voice of terror and agitation—“you must stay here—here in this room—here with me.” She thought he still persisted in leaving, with sudden desperation she threw her arms round him, and with sheer effort of strength dragged him back into the room.

“Surely,” he thought with exultation, “this is victory.” He clasped her in his arms, she made no resistance. “What,” he cried, “has the ice melted at last? The latent passion burst into flame? I understand it now, blind fool that I was. Oh, sweet dissembler, the victory was not to be lightly won—a contest and fight. Oh, glorious triumph.” He bent his head and kissed her lips—“These lips are deadly

cold. What, fainted ! fainted in my arms—oh, darling burden !” He supported her to a large chair—of course he did not dare to summon help—he thought, however, that Nature would kindly act as a sufficient nurse at such a juncture—and drawing the hair from her face, rippling it fondly through his fingers, he fanned her as she lay insensible, and played with the golden hair.

Well, after all, although there had been great divergencies from the beaten track, this new experience of a woman’s ways squared reasonably enough with his old theories—a little more coyness, or a little less—in the present case, there had been merely an excess of coyness, that was the whole difference—the theories themselves were correct enough, and the victory was at last secure. He watched with rapture the colour gradually returning to her face—and then from her own lips, unloosed now from all trammels of consciousness, he heard, with astonishment and anxiety, the vindication of her honour and purity, in broken and

painful utterances of that thought for his safety, which lay closest to her heart.

“What gone to that banquet!” she murmured—“gone to his death!—have mercy—mercy, Grimani, spare him! Oh, do spare him—if the others must die, save his life. Marietta, where am I?—Marietta! Marietta!” she cried loudly.

“Hush, hush!” he answered—“we shall be overheard. You are here at home—here in your own chamber. I am at your side—Maximilian von Stettenheim.”

She had not entirely recovered her senses, and her face wore that dazed expression of painful waking, which the great Florentine has wrought with supreme power into that countenance of “Night” which keeps ward at the tomb of Julian de Medici.

“You here!—still here,” she murmured, “Oh, Heaven be thanked!” She groped feebly for his hand. “Give me your hand, still here! still here!” she cried in tones of heart-felt relief, and she held his hand fast clasped in hers. In another minute she

recovered her consciousness. But she had the presence of mind to remain perfectly quiet, until she had fully regained her self-possession,—she gazed anxiously at the clock, there still remained ten minutes more of torture and shame, before she would be at liberty to reveal the truth. She withdrew her hand from him, and rose from her chair. “I’ve quite recovered—quite well. How stupid I am, pray pardon me—but, indeed, I’ve endured so much anxiety lately.” And then in changed tone, with affected unconcern, “Oh, I remember, you said you had an engagement to sup with Baron Falkenberg. I recollect now, he asked you last night.”

“But why should I not keep this engagement?”

“Why—why? I know not,” she answered with some confusion. “Why, you are my guest now, Colonel von Stettenheim,” she continued archly. “A Venetian lady bids you welcome to her house. What, is Baron Falkenberg’s company preferable

to mine? Would your ladies at Vienna accept such an excuse? Pray be seated, be seated—" she threw herself with careless ease into a chair.

"Those words——"

"What words?" she inquired with surprise.

"You uttered some strange words as you were recovering just now."

"Indeed! did I? What could I have said? I seemed to be in a sort of dream—a feeling of wild confusion."

"Grimani spare him!—if the others must die, spare his life!"

She started with terror at what he told her, but her consummate power of concealing emotion came to her aid, half laughingly she answered "How absurd, surely I could never have talked such wild nonsense."

"My ears were not deceived."

"Well, well—don't be so dreadfully serious about a trifle—if I did make use of those words—it was merely some random

utterance—dreams and faintings—it's the same sort of thing, I suppose, when we regain our consciousness." With a light gesture she dismissed the subject. "Listen!" she exclaimed, "I declare, one can just catch a sound of the band in the piazza—a valse, I'm sure—one of those delicious vales of Strauss. Your military bands are simply perfect. Tell me now," she continued with an arch expression, "I'm so anxious to know the truth—they say your German ladies valse so well, is it really a fact?"

Her manner was so perfectly natural, so bright and unconcerned, that it almost deceived him, and then the fascination of her manner was so potent, it almost drove the ugly words out of his head.

"Come, tell me first what those words mean, and then I'll tell you about the German ladies."

"Still harping on the old string," she replied with a laugh. "Nonsense, nonsense! How can one explain nonsense?"

“I must keep my engagement then!” He was regarding her with close scrutiny, and he observed that she started slightly at his words; she quickly recovered herself, however, and replied in her brightest manner.

“Allow me to observe that a banquet of gentlemen is a very poor excuse for saying farewell to a lady.”

“You evade my question. You force me to go and learn the meaning of those words.”

She could not conceal a shudder, and he marked it.

“What, you still dare to speak of leaving when a lady bids you remain?”

“I am resolved,” he answered firmly.

“But I command!” she exclaimed with a bright smile. “This room is my kingdom. I am a despot here;” and with a playful affectation of coquetry, she laid her hands on his. “My prisoner, bound by strongest chains, a woman’s will.”

Under other circumstances, with a tenth

part of the effort, she could have held that man enchained, a slave at her feet, but she saw with terror, in the expression of his face, that all power of cajolery was at an end.

“No, no, cease these foolish words—farewell!” and he thrust away her hands. Finesse had done its work, for the next few minutes she must retain him as best she might. He was turning to leave her, but she seized his hands again with vehement grasp. “I say you shall not go—you shall not go”—and each word she uttered betrayed her emotion, and justified his suspicions.

“The meaning of those words then?—quick,” he answered roughly.

“Their meaning,—I tell you I know nothing;” she still retained her hold of his hands.

“It’s false!” he cried; “the truth breaks upon me, some horrible foul play is about to take place. Let me go, I say, or, by Heaven, woman as you are, I’ll strike you

down!" It was no easy effort to release his hands from her determined grasp. After a struggle he shook her off, and then, quick as lightning, she flew to the great door of the saloon, turned the key in the lock, and withdrew it, concealing it in her dress. He followed her to the door.

"Locked," he exclaimed, "the key?"

"I have it," she answered.

"Give it, I say!" but before he could arrest her steps, she had flown to the balcony and flung the key into the canal.

"It has a safer guardian than my weak hands," she answered, with calm resolution; "you cannot leave this room, Colonel von Stettenheim."

"That other door," he exclaimed angrily.

"It leads to my apartments," she rejoined. "The windows are barred. The patricians of Venice guard the honour of their daughters with iron bolts," she added, in a tone of sarcasm.

He was fairly outwitted by a woman, but far worse than that, he was fully convinced

by her conduct, that some terrible catastrophe threatened Baron Falkenberg's banquet. He turned upon her with indignation and fury—fury augmented by her impassive demeanour. “Vile deceiver! murder is on hand, and I am caged here. Trapped by a woman's snare; and those men I love, comrades of the battle-field, threatened with death, basely murdered, struck down by the assassin's blow. What's the danger that threatens that banquet? By Heaven you shall tell me.” In his rage, maddened by those fearful thoughts, he seized her hands fiercely—“Speak, woman, speak, I say, or I'll have you dragged to the common prison, the jailer, and the lash.” He flung her roughly away; she made no answer, but she uttered a low cry of anguish—“The jailer and the lash.” Oh, that that horrible threat should have fallen from the lips of the very man, whose life she was striving to save against overwhelming odds.

“Speak!” he cried, with increased fury at her silence, “speak, I say! Accursed

wretch, to lure me here, and fool away the precious moments—men's life blood—with your lying tricks ! Those assassins at their work ! my voice will be heard from the balcony—an alarm may still be in time." He turned from her to go to the balcony, but she stopped him.

"No, no—it's death !"

"Be it death," he answered.

"My death as well as yours," she cried, clinging passionately to him. "The death of the woman who has risked all to save your life."

"Their lives ! their lives, I say," he could not disengage himself from her grasp, and, in his overwhelming anxiety he dragged her along the floor towards the balcony.

The clock struck the half hour ; at last she was free to speak without being a traitor to the cause of Venice.

"Hark, the signal !" she exclaimed, and she released him from her grasp. "Venice has risen upon Austria. All's over—for life or death, the work's done. Your voice from

the balcony will be our death, it cannot save their lives. The Café Quadri is surrounded—if they resist, they die.”

When he heard her words, he ceased from all further effort—he uttered a deep groan of anguish—the strong man was utterly cast down, she led him unresistingly to a chair, he made no reply to what she had said, he asked her no questions, but she saw how acutely he suffered, as men do suffer who are denied the resource of action, and her own heart bled for his. It was all forgiven now, that last cruel threat, and that shameful insult. His head was bent down, and his face buried in his hands. Oh, that she could have listened to the promptings of her heart. Oh, that it had been her right and her privilege, to have thrown her arms round his neck, and poured loving words of comfort and sympathy into his ear. She could only pray that his life might be spared, and right fervently did she pray.

But time was very precious.

“Colonel von Stettenheim, I have sworn to save your life—I have made every preparation in my power. You will find the dress of a peasant in my room—you must disguise your face. As soon as you are ready, my maid will conduct you to a market boat, which is in readiness to convey you to the mainland. You will then be able to reach the Austrian lines.” He seemed to give no heed to her words. She laid her hand on his shoulder, “No time must be lost, you must take advantage of the confusion in the city—it will aid your escape.”

“Escape? no,” he answered, scarcely raising his head.

“What!” she exclaimed with surprise.

“My comrades slaughtered at that Café Quadri. Let those butchers finish their work here.”

“Merciful Heaven!”

“The better part of my life lies dead with them. There’s but little left for the assassin’s knife.”

“This is madness,” she cried.

“No, despair and shame,” he answered in a low tone.

“Be it so,” she rejoined calmly, “I too can die. My own kindred will kill me on the moment if you are discovered here.” It seemed to her, that it would be better to die with this man, than live on in contempt and desolation—better to die with love, and a noble thought of self-sacrifice in her heart. But a new fear flashed into her mind. “No, she must *not* die,” and in words of passionate remonstrance she prayed him to leave her. “No, no, worse than death,” she cried—my name blackened with shame—branded with infamy—blotted out from kith and kin. Not death alone, but death and shame! Have mercy on me, if you have none for yourself—go, save me from worse than death.”

He rose from his chair, “I yield, madam; farewell.” She had saved his life; cold words these for a great gift—but in the thought of murdered comrades, he could not express gratitude for the boon.

“We part to meet no more,” she said in low tremulous tones; “you gave me a life, I have striven to save yours. Would to Heaven I could have saved *their* lives for your sake. The cruel words you have spoken to me, bore the impress of your agony, they are sacred henceforth—more precious to me than all loving words I have ever heard. Farewell for ever. One day,” and she bent her eyes to the ground, “you shall tell the Austrian lady who will be your wife—a Venetian girl saved the life which is to be her happiness and joy.” And then in changed voice, marked with anxiety, “Every moment is dangerous! the disguise, quickly.” She caught with her anxious ears a suspicious sound. “Hush, some one approaches. Merciful Heaven, all is lost—quick, conceal yourself in my room!”

But it was too late; ere he could seek refuge, Grimani had burst in upon them from the panel passage; she uttered a cry of alarm, and flew behind Stettenheim for protection. Stettenheim only needed some

tangible danger to restore his nerve—quick as lightning his sword flashed from its sheath, and the blade arrested Grimani's headlong course. Grimani had a long knife in his grasp, the only weapon he could snatch up in his hurried flight from the police bureau. Stettenheim kept him at bay, but he poured forth words of fury and contempt on Vittoria's head, and she cowered away beneath his scathing denunciation.

“Oh, wretched girl!” he cried, “so this awful shame is the secret of your waning patriotism! In the hour of *our* danger, in the hour of *our* triumph—a lover and an Austrian; this dalliance of infamy—Oh, monstrous disgrace!”

“This lady is innocent—I swear it,” interposed Stettenheim, “by all that is sacred.

“Liar!” rejoined Grimani, “I am Count Grimani! I heard your vile boast to Falkenberg—I was that Franciscan spy you were merciful enough to pity—I was in an agony

of suppressed rage, because I couldn't fly at your accursed throat." He strove to close with Stettenheim,—he tore off his coat, and wrapped it round his left arm. "Knife and vengeance," he muttered, "against infamy and sword." But before he could twist up this buckler, Marco, followed by Count Contarini, entered from the panel.

"Grimani," cried Marco almost breathless—"we are waiting for you, all is ready for your final signal."

"What does this man do here?" exclaimed father and son in astonishment at Stettenheim's presence.

"Look to your daughter, Contarini," answered Grimani, "when you have shot that man down, we shall have full time for the other work."

"This man's presence in my house at such an hour!" exclaimed Contarini with indignation. "What, has the Austrian dared to outrage the sacredness of our very hearth? Death! as a man would shoot a dog."

“Death!” exclaimed Marco, and they both drew their revolvers on Stettenheim.

“Stop!” cried Vittoria in loud voice. She started forward, and threw herself in front of Stettenheim, covering him with her body, and stretching out her arms to protect him to the utmost of her power. “Stop, I say, your bullets shall pierce me first—the fault is mine. He came here at my request. Stop I say—if he die, I die too.”

“Oh, fearful words,” exclaimed Count Contarini with a shudder. “She avows her guilt.” His first impulse was to shoot them both down, but—the woman who stood before him in her fearless defiance was his daughter. He paused, and that pause saved their lives. He lowered his own revolver, and stretching out his hand, forced down Marco’s.

“Marco, lay down your weapon. Let the Austrian skulk away—let that woman go to her shame. You have no sister now, Marco—I have no daughter, we have nothing to avenge.”

In the horror of that condemnation, Vittoria, forgetting all else, flew to her father and threw herself at his feet.

“Mercy, mercy—I’m not guilty! I swear it—a few words will tell you all—listen to me, for Heaven’s sake!”

Stettenheim’s safety was in the balance—it had all passed with such bewildering swiftness—he was in the act of springing on his adversaries with his sword, and making the best desperate fight he might against the odds of their firearms, when Vittoria had thrown herself before him—he was at a loss what course to follow under the new aspect of affairs, when suddenly the tramp of soldiers was heard outside the chamber—the large door of the salon was forced in with the leverage of bayonets, and flew open with a crash, the Austrian soldiers, his own men, crowded into the room. The surprise was too sudden to admit of the flight of the three Venetians—indeed a soldier presently emerged from the panel passage. Grimani, Contarini, and Marco, were immediately sur-

rounded and seized, two soldiers also arrested Vittoria. Falkenberg entered immediately after the soldiers.

“For God’s sake, Falkenberg,” exclaimed Stettenheim—“beat the rappel, occupy all the posts in the city—there’s fearful mischief on hand, a conspiracy to slaughter us all! Don’t stop for explanations, give your orders—my word that they are needful.” Falkenberg, impressed by Stettenheim’s manner gave immediate directions to the orderly who followed him. “Now for the prisoners,” he exclaimed—“have we been in time to secure Grimani?”

“Count Grimani is here,” and uttering those words, Grimani stood forward, two soldiers holding his wrists. All attempts at concealment were now in vain, and it only remained for him to yield liberty and life with dignity and manhood.

Falkenberg flew forward, eager to behold the man he had so long sought.

“Good God! Onofrio!”—and Falkenberg started back with astonishment.

“No thanks to your wit that we stand thus, Baron Falkenberg. I don’t ask for mercy—I should have shot you this evening—if a woman’s accursed handiwork had not marred my plans.”

“You obedient servant,” answered Falkenberg with a mock bow—“I am much beholden to this lady—indeed it is solely to her good offices, that I owe the satisfaction, to me, of our present interview. That envelope with the handwriting of the Countess Vittoria Contarini was, in truth, Pietro’s signal.”

Count Contarini and Marco started with horror at this statement.

“You did not observe the seal on the envelope,” continued Falkenberg, still addressing Grimani with affected politeness—“I understand the cause of your emotion now; probably your heart threw your head out of balance—that seal bore the impression of my signet ring—I caught sight of the seal quite by chance as I was about to sit at table—“better late than never,” I exclaimed, “and behold the adage is amply justified.”

“Vittoria’s treachery!” cried Contarini and Marco at a breath. “Oh shame, blackest shame,” exclaimed Contarini in a voice of anguish—a traitress as well as vile.”

Vittoria broke from the soldiers who guarded her, and flew again to her father.

“No, no—I swear by all that’s sacred—there was not one word of treachery in that letter.”

“Away, abandoned wretch,” answered her father with concentrated rage—“do not pollute my sight. Live on in your shame, and bear for evermore a father’s curse upon your brow.” He spurned her from him and she tottered towards Marco.

“Marco,” she cried in piteous tones—“Oh Marco, listen to me—I swear I’m innocent—have mercy—mercy——”

“What!” answered Marco drawing towards her as far as the soldiers would permit him—“you weary of that vile sin, and you would sin no more? A traitress, and you would fain cease to sell Italian men to

Austrian tyrants. Well, I will have mercy—you *shall* sin no more"—with a sudden effort he gained the freedom of his hands, and drawing a dagger flung himself upon her. Stettenheim had fortunately watched, him, and quick as lightning he caught the upraised wrist, and turned the blow aside—but Vittoria sank beneath its force—the last drop of bitter anguish—"Oh, Marco, Marco,—I have loved you so"—and with a heart-broken moan she fell senseless on the floor. Some women who inhabited the water story, had followed the soldiers into the chamber—they gathered round Vittoria, but they afforded her no assistance.

"Remove the prisoners," exclaimed Falkenberg—"the three men, I mean"—and turning to Vittoria—"Ah, by the way, that woman." "My word is pledged for her," answered Stettenheim.

"Ah, Colonel, do not fear that the police will prove your rivals in that quarter," rejoined Falkenberg with an air of gallantry. The soldiers had formed, and at the com-

mand of Falkenberg, they marched out with their prisoners, Falkenberg following in the rear.

“Has she recovered?” asked Stettenheim of the women—“Why for shame do you let her lie there? Raise her up, and carry her to her chamber.” The women hesitated. “Obey, I say.”

“Traitress,” answered one of the women—“we will not defile our hands by touching her body—the curse of Venice is on her head.” “The curse of Venice,” echoed the other women, and with one accord, they stole out of the room.

He and she were again alone.

“What,” he cried—“deserted by all, cast out—condemned.” He knelt at her side and tenderly raised her head, she was still insensible—“Noble-hearted girl,” he murmured—he spoke the feelings of his heart though the words were naught to her—“I love you now as I have never loved woman before—Love you with the deepest reverence and highest admiration. Oh, fear

not—there is no taint of dishonour in my words. Vittoria, you have nobly ventured your life and your good name for my sake—I swear I will save the lives of those you love if I give my own for the cost.”

Well, she lay there helpless—an outcast from kith and country, with a father’s curse—crushed in soul and body ; but she had won a great victory—a greater victory than most women ever have the chance of winning—she had converted the love which degrades into the love which exalts—she had been offered the dregs of a sensual heart, and she had raised that heart to her own high estate, evoking the nobler germs, and animating it with chivalry and devotion. She lay helpless in that man’s arms, and wholly in his power, but she lay in perfect safety—safe, as if sheltered by a mother’s loving care, for in the soul of that man she had rendered womanhood *sacred* for evermore.

CHAPTER IX.

“THEY TWAIN.”

LESS than half an hour for the process of conversion, but it was amply sufficient—and it needs a whole night to turn dark hair white. Less than half an hour, to convert a sensual passion into a holy feeling of passionate admiration and deepest reverence. Less than half an hour, for beauty and nobility of soul to outshine beauty of form and countenance. It was so in this instance of love; and theologians tell us it is so in matters of religion—somehow—and the history of conversion is rather the statement of a fact than the *rationale* of a process—the secret spring is

touched, the floodgates are opened, and the new influence pours into the soul. With utter sceptics, so they affirm, or with half-believers, conversion follows the same course—nay, even a minute or a second may be enough to work the marvellous change; that minute or second being, so it is said, the tension point of insensible influences cumulating in the soul.

Given the cynicism, the deep-rooted contempt of women, the selfish sensuality of Maximilian von Stettenheim, at what point of resistance shall we discover the triumphant potency of that “breaking strain” of generosity, of self-sacrifice, of devotion—aye, of proffered sacrifice of life? Was it remorse for having mistaken a holy impulse for a vile passion, when she threw her arms round him and dragged him back into the room?—was it the sense of her noble forgiveness of those bitter words of insult, “the jailer and the lash”?—was it gratitude for the forethought and care with which, at the utmost risk to herself, she

had planned the means of his escape, from what she deemed an inevitable doom?—was it admiration for that undaunted bravery, with which she had interposed at the critical moment between the rage of her father and brother, and sheltered him from their bullets, an act which from fiery Italian natures was almost certain to provoke her own death? Any one of all of these might have been sufficient, but the accumulation of all was irresistible; the old life gave away with a crash, and amid the ruins of cynicism, of heartless contempt, of miserable selfishness, Vittoria Contarini created a new life of nobleness, and devotion, and faith.

The results of sudden conversions are oftentimes still more strange than the rapidity of their cause. It frequently happens that the very plans and grooves of the old life, have to be adapted to the new, and consequently work in a very anomalous manner. It was strangely thus in the case of our hero and heroine; all he

had sought as the realization of his basest desires, had become his undisputed possession. He was perfectly free, as far as outer hindrances were concerned, to cover her lips with fervent kisses, as he raised her head in his arms, but her face was now veiled with an impervious veil of sanctity, and her whole form was wrapped in that same veil. He presently discovered, to his great alarm, that blood was oozing slowly from her left side—she must have received some hurt from Marco's averted blow. It was in vain to summon assistance—the women had all left the house, Marietta had fled, the palazzo was deserted by all, save a few of his men who were left on guard. So it fell to him, as a duty, to tear open her dress, to draw aside the coverings from her breast, and staunch for the time, as best he might, the cruel wound—strange work for his hands! As far as he could judge, the wound seemed to be on the surface, a glancing of the dagger; further than this, he only beheld her devotion and her nobleness

—the warp and woof of the sacred veil ;—the beauty of her exquisitely-modelled form, which an artist might have worshipped, was veiled by the thickness of that holy veil from his eyes.

From this point commenced the dilemma of the situation in which they were placed. The weight of difficulty fell on his shoulders ; her condition was one more or less of insensibility—bodily and mental exhaustion, allowing small power of thought—but mercifully, in so far as she could think at all, she was not tortured by fear or apprehension ; she felt, with surest faith, that in the hands of the man for whom she had suffered so much, and whose life she had saved, her honour *must* be as sacred as his own ; that he would surely protect and guard her in this dark hour of her life ; that he *must* love her now with a love worthy of herself.

This was her feeling—a feeling of perfect assurance—though, of course, not summed up in definite words.

She was thoroughly justified in her faith ; it was, indeed, the jealous thought of her honour and reputation, which perplexed him with sore perplexity. He felt that every moment he remained alone with her was a slur upon her fair fame ; that he ought in justice to leave her forthwith : yet it was equally clear, in the commonest dictates of humanity, that he could not leave her alone in that house, under the protection of soldiers and police agents. Equally clear, also, that she ought to be conveyed to her own chamber ; he could easily have carried her in his arms and laid her on her bed, but he did not dare to enter that room alone with her. As he gazed upon her, he started with horror and disgust, at the thought of the venomed tongues carping at her fair fame—the vile jeers and innuendoes which his protests would be in vain to silence. What was the worth of his word in vindication of a woman's honour ? He, who had derided the bare idea with many a scoff and laugh. Egad, he had his sword, it

should be a fight to the death with the man who dared to breathe one word in her disparagement; and yet, risk his life as he might in her vindication, bully as he might, would that be sufficient to convince the world of her purity and innocence? But thinking, did not solve the difficulty, she must be carried to her chamber. Oh, that his mother or sister had been at hand, that he might have confided her to their care as a sacred charge—that he might have poured forth to the only two beings who would have listened to him with credence, the story of her nobleness, and the story of his new true love. But, again, good wishing could not solve the difficulty. He was at least resolved not to enter her chamber alone with her; he summoned an old soldier into the saloon, a sergeant who belonged to the company he had once held; he had done the man some friendly service, and the man was now to do him a service which, simple as it was, could never be repaid—he was to become the surety of a woman's honour.

Stettenheim raised Vittoria in his arms, and at the same time bade the man raise and support her feet, and they carried her to her room and laid her on her bed. He carefully adjusted her pillow, and drew a coverlid over her, the old soldier standing impassively at his side. She asked for water in a low tone, he raised her up and held the glass for her to drink, and laid her head once more on the pillow, she scarcely heeding his good office, and drew aside the golden hair which covered the pillow with its radiance; and head and hair rested in his hands as sacredly as the fair head of St. Catherine rests in the hands of the angel, in that sweet fresco of the gentle artist Bernardino Luini, in which the saint is borne to her tomb in the arms of angels.

He looked upon her for a few moments with remorseful gaze, the old soldier standing at his side, and tears rose in his eyes at the sight of so much beauty and grandeur wrecked in that stormy contest for his safety, and he murmured, with unac-

customed lips, a short prayer that from Heaven might be vouchsafed to her that love and tenderness of woman which was denied to her on earth.

He left the room with hurried steps, the old soldier following him with greater deliberation. On the very threshold of her chamber he met Falkenberg face to face. The Nemesis of his past life was destined to pursue him with relentless steps. Through many a path of degradation he had, in lightness of heart, dragged women to their shame ; and through such paths was he destined, by the force of inevitable circumstances, to drag the woman he worshipped and revered—destined by his own acts to heap obloquy and shame upon her head—destined to writhe helplessly beneath the imputations cast upon her.

He shrank with disgust from the cynical smile on Falkenberg's countenance. Thank Heaven, the old soldier was behind him. He pointed to the man as he emerged from the doorway.

“We have conveyed the Countess Vittoria Contarini to her room,” he said; and he marked the sentence with an emphasis on the “we.”

“One pair of arms might have sufficed for the conveyance of such a burden to such a bourn,” rejoined Falkenberg with a jeer.

Stettenheim mastered his rising indignation. “What are the orders, Falkenberg?”

“Your regiment is to hold the fort and act as a reserve. I’ve just seen the General, but I’ve assured him that as we hold the head and chief of the conspiracy, a rising need not be apprehended. By the way, I mentioned that at my request you had occupied the Palazzo Contarini with a company of your men, being the first soldiers I could lay hands on. So the little escapade with the fair Countess is sufficiently excused by the plea of military service. I am now here to superintend a thorough search of the premises. When we have finished our task, you are to with-

draw your men, as the General considers that the troops had better be concentrated on the appointed positions.”

Falkenberg spoke in a jaunty, triumphant manner. The fact was, before he had left the palazzo with the prisoners, he had succeeded in unearthing Pietro, and had learnt, with terror and dismay, the full extent and desperate nature of the conspiracy, which was being hatched under his very nose, and in some measure in his own office. But although the Baron was not a man of great capacity, he was not by any means a fool. It was easy enough to affirm, that he had been cognizant of every move in the adverse game from the very first; and he did make this affirmation with great effrontery and success.

“It is scarcely possible to tell the truth without some appearance of bravado,” said Falkenberg, with an assumed air of self-depreciation; “but the fact is, every staff officer here in Venice owes his life this evening to me. The General has in the

handsomest manner recognized the service which my bureau has rendered to the Empire. You would scarcely believe, Stettenhiem, that I have retained that scoundrel Grimani as a spy in my pay—*my* pay, mind—for the last two months; it's almost incredible, isn't it?"

"It is," rejoined Stettenheim, but he scarcely heeded Falkenberg's words, for all his thoughts were centred in Vittoria's safety.

"At any moment during the last two months," continued Falkenberg, "I could have laid my hands on that arch conspirator—cat and mouse, hey?"

"Why the deuce didn't you open your claws sooner, instead of running matters so confoundedly close?"

"Why didn't I?" rejoined Falkenberg, with a smile of contempt. "Why, because I wanted evidence—incontrovertible evidence, mind you; nothing less would do. Years ago we were free to whip off people at pleasure and lock them up for life, evidence

or no evidence; but in these days, that infernal English press is always down upon us, for what it is pleased to call acts of arbitrary despotism, and then all Europe sets up a howl. I don't hesitate to affirm, on the strength of my reputation as an official—and I may, I hope, add, a statesman—that the English press, with its absurd cant about liberty of the subject, has rendered the art of government fifty per cent. more difficult throughout Europe. Evidence, hey?—according to their wonderful legal system which favours conspirators and cut-throats—— Come, I can give them evidence now—and that evidence will be the death of Count Grimani, and the death of the two Contarini to boot.”

“Hush, man,” exclaimed Stettenheim with anxiety; “that poor girl in the next room, remember.”

“I beg pardon,” answered Falkenberg with a slight sneer, “I was thinking of state policy, not women. Well, and what do you mean to do with this fair lady?”

“Place her under the care of some of her countrywomen.”

“Easier said than done,” rejoined Falkenberg, “unless you are already weary, and want to be quickly rid of her. Why, the city is in a ferment—they would tear her to pieces; she must be guarded by soldiers; I’m half afraid even the sight of her may provoke an *émeute*. Egad, that kiss of yours is likely to become a state matter, before we arrive at the end of the sequences: the cry is, she has sacrificed her honour to the Austrian officer.”

“It’s a lie!” exclaimed Stettenheim, with an outburst of rage.

“Be calm, I beg,” rejoined Falkenberg; “I’m merely informing you as to the outside cry. Her honour, they say, and her country, as well.”

“Neither, neither,” protested Stettenheim with fervour. “Neither, I swear by all that’s sacred—the purest and noblest woman that ever lived—and true to Venice as well. She asked me here to save my life. It

was I, to my shame, who mistook her motive."

"I am, of course, bound to accept your word," answered Falkenberg with a perceptible smile of incredulity, "but I tell you, the life of Vittoria Contarini is not worth five minutes' purchase in Venetian hands."

Falkenberg turned aside to speak to one of his men, who had entered the saloon.

Stettenheim was fast falling into despair; he racked his brains to discover some honourable asylum for the woman he revered and loved—some place of safety from the rage of her countrymen. Was there any Austrian lady in Venice under whose care she could be placed? Alas, with scarcely any exception, all the Austrian ladies, the wives of the officers and government officials, had, in the serious aspect of political affairs, returned to Germany. Stettenheim suddenly remembered a rumour that the Baroness Falkenberg had delayed her departure. In the Baroness, therefore, was centered his last hope of finding a

German lady to befriend Vittoria. It was not a very bright hope—Baroness Falkenberg was more famed for a fierce assertion of virtue, than for amiability of disposition, or charity of spirit. Added to this, Stettenheim had often cast stones of derision at the immaculate reputation of the Baroness, and it was quite possible that some of these missiles had wounded the lady's *amour propre*.

“Well, Stettenheim,” said Falkenberg, after dismissing his officer, “as far as we are concerned, our work is finished. Pietro has shown my men every hole and corner where documentary evidence might be found. We have made one or two small discoveries; I did not expect to find much, for the secret society is cunning enough to work by oral communications. We are ready, therefore, to retire as soon as it suits you to give the order to the soldiers—the sooner the better, as the General is evidently anxious about the concentration of the troops.”

“But that girl,” murmured Stettenheim.

“I really can’t advise,” answered Falkenberg drily.

“She can’t be left here, you say?”

“She can’t be left with safety in the hands of the Venetians.”

“Every Austrian lady with whom I am well acquainted has left Venice,” exclaimed Stettenheim; “I must throw myself on your kindness and generosity—I must ask you and the Baroness Falkenberg to give an asylum for this night at least to that poor girl.”

“Heavens, sir!” exclaimed Falkenberg with indignation, “do you mean to insult my wife?”

“I swear she is innocent,” answered Stettenheim very humbly. “For mercy’s sake, have some compassion for me! I have assured you how utterly I misunderstood the purport of that letter; it was written in fervent anxiety to save my life, and my life she has positively saved; have compassion on us both. Remember, if she

lives, she will one day become my wife. Can I give better proof of her innocence and her honour? ”

“Let me tell you, Colonel von Stettenheim,” said Falkenberg, endeavouring to control his irritation, “that I have no desire to quarrel with you about a love affair, and I very emphatically protest against a quarrel being fastened upon me, at a period when my mind is burdened with a hundred State anxieties and responsibilities; but I tell you plainly, the Countess Vittoria Contarini shall not enter the presence of my wife. Scarcely two hours ago, you informed me with all possible significance, that this was a return visit—you told me to congratulate you on your triumph over the virtue of a Venetian lady, and now you calmly ask me to introduce this very lady to my wife! I confess, I do not understand this sort of conduct.”

“I have given my word for her innocence,” protested Stettenheim in a tone of despair.

“Your word for a woman’s honour!” rejoined Falkenberg, infusing as much sarcasm as he dared into his voice. “Well, I have accepted it—I am bound to accept the word of an officer and a gentleman, but more than that I am not bound to do, and more than that I will not do. I wait for your command to the soldiers,” he added, with official punctilio; “your escort is necessary for our safety.”

So all hope of refuge at the hands of Falkenberg was at an end. The field of choice was growing very narrow; from the Venetians, scorn, contempt, and death—from his own compatriots, scorn and contempt. Two asylums only offered themselves—both safe as regarded personal safety, but in one alone would her fair fame be secure; it was a hard choice to make, but the last consideration was paramount—a prison. The cruel threat of his anger was now forced upon him by his despair—her honour would at least be secured by iron bars.

“Baron Falkenberg, you have refused all friendly help to this poor girl.”

“We have fully discussed that point, sir,” interrupted Falkenberg.

“I cease to address you as a friend,” continued Stettenheim; “I address you as an official of the Empire. I denounce the Countess Vittoria Contarini as an aider and abettor of this conspiracy against Austrian authority.”

“What do you say?” exclaimed Falkenberg with astonishment.

“I denounce the Countess Vittoria Contarini!”

“This woman that you—pardon me.” A threatening glance from Stettenheim cut short Falkenberg’s words.

“Do your duty, sir—arrest her!”

“What evidence?” exclaimed Falkenberg.

“At the proper time I shall be able to prove cognizance and complicity.”

“Egad!” exclaimed Falkenberg, “if I had my will, some of these fine lady conspirators should smart for it.”

Stettenheim shuddered at Falkenberg's words. "No violence," he exclaimed, losing all self-control, "or, by God——"

"Spare your threats, sir—that cursed English press——"

"Thank God for it!" rejoined Stettenheim. "Arrest her, I say—her life will be safe in a prison; ill use her, you dare not."

"I understand you at last," exclaimed Falkenberg with a sneer. "So—so, another attempt to cast your dilemma upon me. I refuse to arrest this lady."

"At your peril," rejoined Stettenheim.

"Don't dictate to me, sir," answered Falkenberg with *hauteur*.

I have received special instructions from Vienna not to arrest women for political offences, unless under very special circumstances. An arrest of this woman would probably cause an *émeute*. I choose to exercise my discretion—I refuse the arrest! Come, sir," he continued, "as you compel me to assume a peremptory tone, I desire the escort of your men forthwith."

And now the acceptance of that final refuge was forced upon him, against the bare thought of which his soul had revolted with abhorrence—the refuge of shame and dishonour, which he had striven by every desperate means in his power to evade—the barrack-room—his own chamber in the barracks. Aye, and brought thither in such secrecy as might avoid an open contravention of military rules, and yet with unavoidable publicity—with innuendoes and scoffs—thither, where women worthy of shame and degradation, had been greeted by shame and degradation—thither, to such an asylum of disgrace, was this woman of his true love to be conveyed—the woman he honoured with the highest honour and reverence, holding her worthy, in her spotless innocence, of the ministration of angels.

Stettenheim, without making any reply to Falkenberg, gave the order for the soldiers to hold themselves in readiness to leave the palazzo. It was necessary to

pass some twenty yards across a small piazza to the canal; a crowd of angry and excited Venetians had gathered in front of the palace, women as well as men. Angry cries of imprecation on Vittoria, verifying but too truly Falkenberg's statement, were audible in the saloon. The soldiers were directed to clear a space to the water, and with some difficulty the crowd was forced back. As soon as the lieutenant in command had reported that matters were prepared, Stettenheim addressed Falkenberg and the lieutenant in words of marked significance.

“I request you, gentlemen, to remain in this room, while I enter the chamber of the Countess Vittoria Contarini.”

He knocked for admission at the door; no answer was given, and after a short pause he entered, leaving the door wide open. Vittoria had scarcely moved since he left the room; physical prostration and insensibility, rather than sleep; there was evidence of fever, too, when he touched her

hand. He fell on his knees at her bedside, and whispered in her ear the terrible position in which they were both placed. She did not seem to be able to give heed to his words, but he did tell her—he could not refrain from giving utterance to the feelings that burnt at his heart—he did tell her, that his life from thenceforth was dedicated to her, that his love was so strong, that one day it would be able to vindicate her honour from all reproach: that the sole object of his life would be gratitude to her, for the life she had saved.

“Oh, Vittoria!” he cried with fervour, “through evil report and sore calumny, shielded by my love, which your sacrifice has made pure and noble—to honour, and reverence, and noble reputation. Come, dearest, you can believe in me.”

She could not follow his words, but believe in him she could; she let him raise her from her bed, let him enfold her in his cloak; and so, half supported, half carried, he led her to the door of her cham-

ber. Significant smiles gathered on the half-averted faces of the two men who were waiting for them in the saloon, but he alone felt the bitterness; she was unconscious of everything but her faith in him.

Across the piazza to the water, with the howling crowd cursing her as a traitress to the Venetian cause, and almost forcing in the line of the soldiers in their mad fury—missiles flung at them both, but he warded off all danger from her—and worse than missiles, one loathsome word of disgrace, hissed and shrieked by women and men. He drew the cloak over her head to hush the accursed sound from her ears, but he himself writhed beneath that word of shame cast on her innocence; and so they gained the gondola in safety, though the soldiers had a hard matter to stem an ugly rush of the crowd on the water steps.

At last, safely away from the narrow water streets, into the open water! Oh, the balmy sweetness of the night! And Venice, that city of inherent fascination

and romance, fittest scene for love's background, and a glorious Italian moon in all its fulness of glory, fit light to illuminate love's illusions, and the gentle swing of the gondola, and lulling music of soft ripple at the prow. Many a light word had he whispered, and many a false vow had he uttered in past hours like the present. Vittoria lay almost insensible in his arms, and he clasped her burning hand in his, but now the words he spoke, came from the depths of the heart, and not from the throat, and the false vows were changed to earnest prayers. Marvellous change from the life of cynicism to the life of faith ; and very strange did it seem to him as he looked down on her fair, pale face, with all the marks of painful combat on her brow, lying in the unrest of exhaustion on his bosom : passing strange, that the girl to whom he had offered the deepest insult, should be the only being in the world who had perfect faith in his sincerity and honour ; and beautiful as was her face even in its distress and weariness, far more

beautiful in his new feelings was the noble spirit dwelling beneath the beauty of her countenance, and beneath the depth of her glorious eyes. It seemed, indeed, that she must be some bright being of old legend, compelled to assume human form ; for so highly did he estimate her character, that he could scarcely believe she was really a woman—a woman to love and reverence—hard even in his new faith, to attribute such excellence to womanhood. Very strange, also, to look back from the present to the past—that past, long, long past—and yet in the ordering of time little more than two hours past ; but emotion can count a year in a heart-beat, and many a heart-beat had there been, in that progress from cynicism to faith, from contempt to unbounded admiration.

And so they arrived, in due course, safely at the barrack ; and then the final consummation of all disgrace—she was conveyed half-secretly to his chamber and laid upon his bed. Two German women, soldiers'

wives, women unworthy of entering her presence—but at least they were women—came and watched her; into their care did he solemnly commend her, with promises of lavish payment; and the regimental surgeon presently came, under protest, to afford medical assistance. Stettenheim waited outside his own chamber door, pacing up and down the corridor with the greatest anxiety to learn the medical report, and he prayed earnestly for the woman he loved, using unwonted prayers furbished up from the old store chambers of childish memory, and according in their innocence with her purity. At last the doctor left the room. He shook his head gravely. “The wound was nothing—but fever, the brain—they must hope for the best, but he feared the reason might be affected.” When the doctor saw the tears rush into Stettenheim’s eyes, and marked the look of despair in his countenance, and the tremor which shot through his whole frame, he marvelled greatly. “This man really loves,” he said

to himself. "A thousand pities that love and shame should be linked together."

And so it came to pass, that from first to last, in the course of about two hours, more or less, first one person and then another came to believe in Vittoria's shame; and finally, throughout the whole city of Venice, there only remained one being who believed in her virtue, and purity, and nobleness—the man, who at the commencement of those very two hours, had striven to accomplish her degradation, the man, whose life she had redeemed, and rendered worthy of her own noble love.

END OF VOL. II.

FOUR STUDIES OF LOVE.

BY A. W. DUBOURG,

JOINT AUTHOR OF THE COMEDY, "NEW MEN AND OLD ACRES."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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II.

ENNOBLED BY LOVE.

(VITTORIA CONTARINI.)

Continued.

VITTORIA CONTARINI;

OR,

LOVE THE TRAITOR.



CHAPTER X.

LOVE, A PRIEST.

THE conversion having been achieved, it becomes us to look for its fruits. Many more coals of fire had been heaped upon the head of Stettenheim than were necessary to ensure the endurance of his repentance; at any rate, there was no danger of backsliding; but it must not be supposed that the conversion of such a man was an easy affair. On the contrary, it was a very difficult conversion;

it had needed the full powers of that great principle of self-sacrifice to be called into play—not merely asserted as a principle, but actually embodied in practice. The whole process would be perfectly intelligible to the meanest capacity, if it had proceeded by the theological route. The preacher had spoken, and, behold, the sinner was instantaneously converted. It is difficult to trace the parallel lines of analogy when they lie buried beneath surface divergencies ; it is difficult to understand how a young girl, in her dazzling beauty, should be clothed with the powers of priest or preacher, nay, should have been triumphant in her ministration, when eloquence would have been powerless, and earnestness answered by a sneer or a scoff. Nor would allegory help us by its embodiment, for the Mrs. Theology of painter or sculptor is a dame of severe aspect, with eyes regardless of earth, and upturned to heaven, certainly not a young girl capable of all the bright enjoyment of life, steeped in

all the attractiveness of girlhood, ready enough, in happy moments, to whirl enthusiastically in the *deux temps*, or play indefatigably at Badminton; and yet, on the theory of providential intervention for the salvation of sinners, Vittoria Contarini, when she was dragged by the officers, amid jest and banter, into the presence of Stettenheim, was a far apter instrument for the purpose of conversion than a preacher of the severe stamp of John Knox or Calvin, for she actually succeeded where the preacher would have had very slender chance of success; nay, would, in all probability, have been summarily ejected from the room—but the methods of conversion are manifold, and grace runs in unexpected channels.

Most marked of all the results of Stettenheim's conversion was the terrible earnestness of his new life; the *poco curante* spirit of the past was cast out of his soul—the pleasant sedative of the old scoff had entirely lost its soothing power. He paced

to and fro in an agony of suspense near his chamber door; for a few days it was a question of life or death; one woman more or less, according to the old scepticism; but in his new faith, *one* woman only in the whole world. Strangely enough, the idea of Vittoria dwelt no longer in his mind as a splendid image of physical beauty; he now thought of her as a being fit for noblest love, in whom the great virtues of devotion, and undaunted bravery, and self-sacrifice were embodied.

At last, the doctors gave hopes that her life would be spared—but her reason; that was their great anxiety. Very deep was the despair of the man who had hitherto only estimated women for form and face, at the fear lest the beautiful soul should desert its tenement—that the body should indeed live, while the woman he *now* loved should die.

So Vittoria, all unconscious as she was, ruled her lover from her sick bed. He watched her, from time to time, in an

agony of despondency; the face was still very fair and lovely, even in illness, but the woman he loved, no longer stood revealed in the gateway of the eyes, in the manifold expressions of the face, or in the sympathetic inflexions of the voice—a blank, unmeaning, unconscious gaze was drawn, as a veil, betwixt her and the outer world. Oh, God! was Vittoria still behind that veil? Very wonderful were the teachings which love taught to Stettenheim—a man of action, a warrior, a *beau sabreur*—it forced him to sit still and think of deep things. The mysteries of body and soul were unrolled before his eyes—literally, *con amore* was the study. Many were the painful, heartrending doubts and queries of his psychological inquiry. Would a healing of the fine tissues of the brain yield Vittoria back again to him? or had she really gone away to that bourn whence no traveller returns, bequeathing to him, as if in mockery, that fair body which had once been his only desire? or as long as life

lasted, would the living soul be imprisoned in that living body—locked away as Ariel in the cleft pine, denied all power of outward manifestation, all power of intercourse with the world through the medium of the senses—a soul *buried* in a fair body—a living soul in a living coffin?

Yes, they believed she would get well, but the mind they feared—yes, as lovely as ever, but, alas! the mind. Oh, fearful thought, he would be able to clasp her in his arms—that fair form, heart and pulses beating with life; but *she*, the woman he loved, would be far away from him, as far away as if her soul rested in Heaven and her body lay at peace in the blessed earth! Oh, heart-rending thought, that seeing, she would never see him, and hearing, she would never hear his words! Oh, great God! he cried in his anguish and despair, somewhere or somehow, a time must come, if never on earth, then certainly in Heaven, when he would be able to declare how much he loved her and revered her,

and she would be able to *know* the truth of his words. We must remember that Vittoria's lover was no student of the midnight lamp, no poet of fine fancies, no ascetic nursed on thin abstractions, but a man who had deliberately made the sensual his treasure-house; and this girl, by the sheer power of her nobleness, a nobleness in the light of which her splendid physical beauty paled away, was absolutely dragging him from earth to heaven.

Many a weary hour did he watch at her bedside, with her listless hand clasped in his, gazing anxiously on her unconscious eyes, waiting and praying for the return of the woman he loved; and many a time did he leave her room in despair, fearing her return was hopeless. At last one day she suddenly burst into tears, and then for a moment Vittoria came back; her eyes were once more lighted by the soul—she recognized him, and she smiled on him with a sweet smile. Involuntarily he started forward; but in the moment, before

his arms were outstretched, she had fled, and the blank gaze filled her eyes once more, and the smile died away into vacancy. But, thank God! Vittoria *was* behind the veil! He fell on his knees, and burst into tears; aye, and from the very depths of his heart. Nevertheless, the fact on the face of it is very anomalous, nay, even absurd—this *beau sabreur*, this haughty martinet of the parade-ground, this social sceptic, on his knees before an unconscious woman, this Don Giovanni in tears—a sensualist weeping over a woman's soul! Well, there are very strange sights to be seen, when people go “behind the scenes” of the human heart.

At the earliest possible moment, Stettenheim had written a letter to his sister at Vienna, praying her to come at all cost and nurse Vittoria, and, more than nurse, vindicate Vittoria's character by her presence. It was a great boon to ask, for the Countess von Rosen had young children to leave, and her husband was with Benedek's army;

but Stettenheim's letter, which declared the whole truth, was irresistible; and the Countess came, notwithstanding great difficulties, for the roads to Italy were blocked with troops and munitions of war, and there was a delay of many days before the journey could be accomplished. The Countess assumed her duties of nurse with the greatest enthusiasm; she was a woman of loving heart, and she felt that Vittoria had striven to save her brother's life at a fearful cost; she was also a woman of great goodness and piety, and she felt that Vittoria had wrought an entire change in her brother's life; so, for the first time in her existence, Vittoria was loved with the full love and tenderness of a true woman's heart.

Fortified by his sister's presence, Stettenheim addressed himself to the difficult task of vindicating Vittoria's character to her father and brother. As in his sister's case, he trusted to an absolute truth of jot and tittle, and the full measure of truth stood him in good stead; the two men in their

prison came to believe as well in Vittoria's innocence as in her patriotism and fealty to Venice; they bitterly repented, with many tears, the hasty work of curse and dagger; and with death imminent—they had been tried by court-martial and condemned to death—they blessed Stettenheim for his devotion to Vittoria, and they solemnly confided her to his care. Nor was Grimani less generous to his rival and foe.

In the first moment of Stettenheim's enthusiastic recognition of Vittoria's devotion, he had sworn to save the lives of Count Contarini and Marco, even at the cost of his own life. He did not shrink from the serious consequences of his oath. When the charmed circle is once entered, there is a strange contagion in the principle of self-sacrifice, and self casts off selfishness at the magic touch. The man who had hitherto only sought the profit of his own pleasure and well-being, now sought no other object but devotion to the woman he loved. He had had large objects in his

heart, but she had replaced them all—some honourable ones; he was a soldier, he had loved his profession, and had been very eager for its laurels, but the largest of all objects of his heart had been “self”; and now he was ready to lay down reputation, and self, and life itself, so that he might be worthy of the love of that girl, who lay helpless and unconscious, amid disgrace and shame, in his barrack-room.

Stettenheim's generous purpose was fraught with serious difficulties; the bureaucratic section at Vienna was greatly proud of Falkenberg's complete success in the discovery and prompt discomfiture of the plot. It was, in fact, a triumphant assertion of the great bureaucratic principle—Venice had been preserved to Austria; admittedly under Providence, but red-tape and dockets had been manifestly the appointed medium of interposition. Falkenberg's undoubted claims to the highest civil distinction, were loudly advocated by his official friends, and he accordingly received

a decoration equivalent in all respects to our highest civil honours. Then arose the question as to the punishment to be meted to the conspirators. Certainly death, said the bureaucratic section; the powers of red-tape and dockets must be enforced by a severe example; these men were guilty upon evidence which all Europe must admit: let the law therefore take its course. Stettenheim strove as best he might against this powerful party, using to the utmost all the court influence he possessed; he wrote the most anxious letters to his mother at Vienna, imploring her to leave no stone unturned on the side of mercy. Alas! all his efforts were in vain—the order was issued for the execution of the condemned men.

And now there only remained the one desperate chance of effecting an escape through the bribery of jailers, with the almost certainty of ultimate discovery, and the attendant forfeiture of honour and even life; but still Stettenheim held by his oath.

Day by day, Vittoria's recovery progressed. Perhaps love was the best nurse and doctor—the soul wandered back at fitful intervals. One day, and it was a hopeful sign, Vittoria recognized a new face in the Countess von Rosen; it troubled her at first, but when she was told that her nurse was the sister of Maximilian von Stettenheim, she was greatly comforted, and she manifested evident satisfaction at the loving attention which the Countess lavished upon her. Stettenheim's voice, however, was the magic voice; with the lowest tone, a whisper even, he could summon back the soul to the senseless eyes, and the worn face would respond with a smile of happiness. Not that she was as yet conscious of very much, or able to remember very much; her soul had been only able to snatch from the locked chambers of memory the one precious thought of his love. Thank God, if only that—she could now both see him and hear his voice; but when he tried to tell her of other things—of the

forgiveness, for instance, of her father, and Marco, of their repentance and sorrow—the countenance grew perplexed, and the light of the soul gradually faded from her eyes—responsive only to the fervent utterances of his love.

“Oh, Max!” cried his sister to him one day—they had both been watching at Vittoria’s bedside, and women love to improve every occasion with a moral—“God has given the soul of that sweet girl into your keeping; devoted love can alone save mind and reason. Oh, brother mine,” she added in solemn tones, “I know you will be faithful to this holy charge;” and the Countess kissed his forehead, her tears falling on his upraised face. She did not know the terrible perplexity that troubled her brother’s mind. He knew that his life was Vittoria’s life, and yet he was about to risk his life, which was hers, in the effort to save her father and brother. Better let them die, and live for her. Oh, sad dilemma! nay, better, at all cost, to be

true to his oath; her soul was in God's hand; but if she ever recovered, how could he stand in her presence conscious of a broken oath?

Count Contarini and Marco had earnestly prayed Stettenheim to allow them to see Vittoria before they died; it was a great risk, not perhaps so much as regarded bodily health—her strength had been greatly restored under the devoted care of the Countess von Rosen, but the mind still remained in a shattered state; Stettenheim felt, however, that a dying request ought not to be lightly refused.

It was accordingly arranged that Vittoria was, if possible, to be conducted to the prison on the morning appointed for the execution. Two hopes still remained to Stettenheim; his mother was to make one final appeal to the Empress, and a reprieve might arrive at the last moment. So much for legitimate effort. With regard to the plan for an escape as a final resource, Stettenheim had ascertained from an old

custodian of the cells of the "Piombi," where the prisoners were confined, that a certain cell communicated by a secret staircase passing behind the great council chamber beneath, and so downwards to the water. This passage had been long overlooked, and indeed the "Piombi" was only occupied as a prison, owing to stress of prison accommodation, by reason of the numerous arrests which had been made in the city. The custodian was an Italian, so Stettenheim had very little trouble in purchasing his silence; the next difficulty was with the jailer, a German official. This man was utterly ignorant of the existence of the secret staircase, and by dint of excuses as to the convenience of the cell for three prisoners, supported by heavy bribes, Stettenheim contrived to induce the jailer to shift the three prisoners into the desired cell.

At this point a new difficulty arose; as the period for the execution approached, all opportunities of communicating with the

prisoners were, through the jealous watchfulness of Falkenberg, greatly restricted; Stettenheim had thus been unable to disclose the secret of escape, and, to his dismay, the jailer, on whom he had counted for assistance, was suddenly removed, and an old soldier of tried fidelity, appointed in his place, with strict directions to hold the prisoners in frequent inspection through a sliding flap in the door of the cell.

It was so far fortunate that Stettenheim had been appointed to the military command of the prison on the day of the execution; but the custody of the prisoners rested absolutely with the civil authorities. Stettenheim had a perfect right to walk up to the cell door, beyond that limit, however, he was powerless. Written communication with the prisoners was strictly interdicted, unless the document bore the official seal of the police bureau, in evidence of previous examination. Stettenheim had written the secret of escape on a slip of paper, and fatal as were the consequences which discovery

would entail upon him, he was, in his ab-
his life in the attempt to redeem his oath.

sorbing love for Vittoria, prepared to sacrifice

But, alas ! how to convey that paper to
the prisoners ! He paced up and down the
antechamber to the condemned cell, racking
his brain for some expedient, but the jailer
stood like a statue, stolidly gazing through
the sliding trap. A strange spectacle for
gods and men, as the saying goes—fooled
at last by a woman—the veriest puppet of
one of those despised toys. What, a gallant
soldier conceive a desperate act of treason,
involving death and shame ? And all for the
love of a woman. Surely a little wholesome
cynicism would have cured the madness—a
dazed, half-witted girl ; let her go her way,
a lunatic asylum, if need be. Why, there
were hundreds of handsome women, with
souls thoroughly adapted for the sensual
enjoyment of life, ready enough to give him
welcome. Then *vive la joie !* No, alack,
women and the wine-cup could not save
him—the allurements of self-sacrifice was too

strong; that pleasant debonair monitor, “self,” clothed in vestments *couleur de rose*—that hitherto faithful “self,” with prudent counsellings of safety, and delightful ease and pleasure, slunk away from the countenance of that stern beauty, clothed in sorry garments, but “all glorious within.” How those aforesaid Pagan gods would have laughed at the notion over their nectar cups—the self-sacrifice of a man for the sake of a woman.

Men certainly laughed and wondered at Stettenheim’s altered state. Lieutenant Platten, for example, had been a very earnest scholar in his Colonel’s school of philosophy, and he was fairly bewildered. After the performance of certain military duties, Platten had joined companionship with Stettenheim in the antechamber.

“Ah, Platten, what’s the last telegram from Germany?” exclaimed Stettenheim, by way of relief from his painful thoughts.

“Worse and worse, Colonel! there’s no doubt Marshal Benedek’s retreat is an utter

rout. I declare it's more than flesh and blood can endure, to be tied down here among these Venetian curs without one chance of striking a blow for the Emperor."

"For mercy's sake, Platten," answered Stettenheim with a sigh, "don't mention that thought, it half drives me mad; those men who lie there, still and cold on the hill-side at Sadowa—well, it's a defeat, but their death is glorious! For them, each fatal bullet is wreathed in a crown of honour. Enough of that; you are in command of the firing party to-day.

"Oh, accursed work," exclaimed Platten, "an executioner!"

"It's your duty—and your duty may yet call you to harder work," rejoined Stettenheim in low tones. "Pshaw! those men in that dungeon yonder are Venetians, we are Austrians; their hatred, their defiance, and their scorn, will support them to the last—death from the bullets of an enemy. Come, come, Platten, the death of a patriot is not terrible, but think you how fearful must be

death from the bullets of your own country-men ! ”

“ The death of a traitor, you mean,” exclaimed Platten.

“ Aye, the death of a traitor ! ” rejoined Stettenheim, with a shudder. “ His last gaze fixed on the faces of friends—maybe the very men he has fought with, shoulder to shoulder, on the battle-field. It’s a fearful thought, a fearful thought ; ” and Stettenheim turned away to conceal his emotion.

“ Any chance that these men will be reprieved ? ” asked Platten.

“ I dare not hope it,” responded Stettenheim, “ but still there is hope ; my mother was to have an interview with the Empress this very day. Heaven knows, I’ve moved every power at Vienna.”

“ You will pardon me, Colonel, but with regard to these prisoners, I really confess that I have no great sympathy with them ; it was a very cruel, and at the same time a very hopeless plot. Come now, confess ;

but for that girl's sake you would not have made these efforts."

"I do not deny it," answered Stettenheim.

"Well, then," rejoined Platten, "I would not take the matter so seriously to heart; these love episodes of a man's life, they lightly come and go—why, I've learnt that very philosophy from your own lips. I thought that love was the passion of a fleeting hour."

"I thought so to," replied Stettenheim, in a grave voice.

"Well," rejoined Platten, eager to enforce the argument.

"Well," interrupted the Colonel with vehemence, "it was a false thought! Love is a thing of terrible endurance—stronger than all else—stronger than honour—stronger than shame—stronger than the fear of death. My philosophy has been scattered to the winds, I know the truth now. Happy for you, if you learn it less bitterly than I have. Oh, thrice happy, if

you learn it from the happiness of her you love. I have learnt it from the random babble of fevered lips—from a mind shattered by anguish and despair—from the struggle of feeble life in the eager grasp of death ; that's been my rough schooling in love this week past, Platten."

An orderly entered with a telegram, which he placed in the Colonel's hand. Stettenheim with trembling fingers tore open the cover ; he glanced anxiously at the paper, and then, with a look of despair, crushed it in his hand.

"A fresh disaster in Germany?" inquired Platten, with deep concern.

"No!" answered Stettenheim briefly ; "it's a final negative to all hope of a reprieve." And now the fatal step must be taken—he must turn traitor to save their lives. Once more the fearful thought of a traitor's death and shame, flashed through his brain, but he did not flinch from his purpose ; he approached the jailer, he hoped to gain admission to the cell by an assumed

air of command. "I desire to see the prisoners."

"Colonel," answered the jailer, respectfully but firmly, "I am forbidden to open this door unless upon a written order from the governor."

"I am military commandant here," answered Stettenheim.

"My orders, Colonel, are from Baron Falkenberg. I dare not disobey."

"Enough, you do your duty," rejoined Stettenham, haughtily; "here is the Baron!"

Falkenberg entered the ante-chamber in all the elation of his new honours.

"Falkenberg!" exclaimed Stettenheim.

"One moment, Colonel," replied Falkenberg, "I must inspect the prisoners. This old building makes the most unsatisfactory prison we have in Venice, but we are so cursedly pressed for room just now;" and Falkenberg peered anxiously through the sliding flap.

"To my surprise," said Stettenheim,

“I have been refused admission to the prisoners.”

“The jailer has only obeyed his orders,” answered Falkenberg. “No person is to be admitted to the cell while these men remain under the civil authority—in half an hour they will be rendered into your custody.”

“Surely,” persisted Stettenheim in mortified tone, “you will not refuse my request.”

“Colonel,” answered Falkenberg drily, “in this matter I have no option; my orders are from the Governor of Venice.”

“But that unfortunate girl,” urged Stettenheim, “the Countess Vittoria Contarini, surely you will not refuse her the boon of one last farewell—it would be inhuman at this hour of death.”

“I dare not grant it,” replied Falkenberg decisively; “besides, let me tell you, it’s scarcely mercy she should see them.”

“That’s my affair, Falkenberg. I demand a pass on her behalf.”

“Colonel von Stettenheim,” answered

Falkenberg, with all the irritation of ruffled official dignity, "you have already interfered far too much in this matter. I protest against the civil authorities of the Empire being held at the beck and call of some Venetian lady, that Colonel von Stettenheim has chosen to take under his protection."

"Baron Falkenberg," replied Stettenheim, striving to master his rising indignation, "this is not a time for a fracas between us, but in my presence no man shall breathe a light word against that noble girl—you know well enough that she is under the protection of my sister."

"Pardon me," answered Falkenberg, awed by Stettenheim's manner, "I merely vindicate my authority from interference." After giving emphatic directions to the jailer, to keep a strict watch on the prisoners, Falkenberg withdrew.

An orderly entered and informed Stettenheim that Vittoria waited below. He gave directions for her to be conducted to him. He then turned to Platten and addressed

him with anxious words: "You must help me now, Platten—I may never make such another request; fly to the Governor of Venice, and obtain an order for Vittoria's admission to the cell; she will remain here on the spot till you return. I know I can trust you—I know you will not fail me."

"I will not fail," answered Platten, resolutely, and he hurried to fulfil his mission.

Stettenheim felt that in the keeping of his oath it would probably be the last time he should ever see Vittoria. "Ah," he murmured, in the depth of his anguish, "at last a woman to worship and esteem, and I must lose her. Oh, bitter retribution! lesson learnt too late. Vision of a better life, my life redeemed by her—blessed vision, seen but to vanish as a dream. Not self and selfish love, for death stands close at hand—self-sacrifice for love—a traitor's death, but a noble woman's love."

Vittoria was led in resting wearily on the arm of the orderly. It pained Stettenheim

to see how sadly weak and worn she looked, and still more painful was the dull, purposeless expression which rested on her countenance. He drew her tenderly to him, and the orderly left them together.

“My poor child, how much this effort has tried you!”

“Oh, quite well, quite well!” she murmured. “Where is Colonel von Stettenheim? I wish to see him.”

Oh, God, that he should have to leave her in all her sad weakness of mind and body!

“Don’t you know me, Vittoria?” he asked in painful tones.

She gazed at him for a few moments, and the feeble spark of recognition burst into light.

“Oh, yes, yes; how foolish of me,” she answered, “it was only for the moment. Faces glide away so strangely from my mind. Let me take your hand; when I grasp your hand all goes well, and I feel quite strong. It was a fearful time, and I’ve not recovered yet—oh, so very very

fearful! My memory seemed utterly lost, only one recollection of a whole life remained unbroken—the thought of your love, I could cling to that—to that alone, amid the whirling chaos; oh, sweet consolation! it saved me from madness and despair, and led me back at last to peace and calm. You *do* love me still? Oh, Max! say, you love me. The words lull away all pain, and build up the shattered thoughts.”

The whole life of a soul was breathed into those words, “say, you love me.”

“I do love you, Vittoria; you know I love you.”

“I *do* know it,” she answered, fervently, “your wife, my husband. Oh, Max, those words mean happiness—happiness, though all else be sad and dark; sunshine for our lives, sunshine! But why this gloomy place? why bring me here?” she asked, gazing around with troubled glance.

“It is their prison. Alas! there is no hope of a reprieve.”

“A reprieve! what reprieve?” she inquired in tones of bewildered surprise.

“They are doomed to die,” he answered.

“To die! death! why talk of death? No, no, I cannot die now! *you* love me, I cannot die;” and she clung to him with desperate grasp, as if indeed death were striving to tear her from him.

“I speak of your father and brother, Vittoria.”

“My father,” she exclaimed, in terror. “I recollect now. Oh, that fearful curse; it rings in my ears, tears my very brain.” She buried her head in his bosom. “All is dark again!”

“They have forgiven you, dearest,” he answered, soothingly; “they know your innocence. I have tried so often to make you remember that you are forgiven.”

“Forgiven!” she exclaimed; “then all’s well.” But it was only too evident that she did not comprehend his words. “Let’s go, Max, I can’t breathe here. Where did you say we are to live?—that castle by the

river—I forget names, but the joy of the thought remains—it was your home; they would love me—it was your home; you would be at my side. Oh, Max!” she exclaimed, and her voice changed from exultation to sad earnestness, “pray for me, as you love me: pray that the thick darkness may never cover my soul again; that the one ray of light, your love, which pierced the darkness, may never be quenched.”

“You are better now, dearest; you will soon grow stronger, and then——”

“And then I shall awake,” she answered, quickly. “Your love is only a sweet dream now; I shall awake and behold its devotion and truth. Oh, blessed Mary!” she cried in piteous, beseeching tones, “listen to my prayer! When I gaze on him, give the light of knowledge to my eyes; when I hear his voice, quicken the thought of him in my soul.”

And he must lose her! Still clinging to him, she whispered in his ear in fervent

words, "If my soul drifts away into that dark nothing—hold me in your arms; whisper your name in my ear—don't weary; and through Our Lady's merciful love, that sweet word, like a magic cord, will draw me back to consciousness and memory, and the blank gaze of my eyes will be filled with your image, and I shall be saved, a living soul in a living body. Promise——" Her eyes seemed to gather life and strength from his eyes, and for the moment almost all her old beauty returned. Then let *them* die, and let him live for her. But the allurements of self-sacrifice drew him away even from the woman he loved.

"Vittoria, you must strive to make one great effort; you can save their lives. Marco——"

"Marco!" she echoed, with readier perception.

"Your brother Marco, your father, you can save their lives."

"Their lives! How?"

"They are going to admit you to the

cell. Give this slip of paper to your father. It contains directions for opening a trap-door which leads by a secret staircase to a door on the canal. A gondola is in readiness. Courage, and their lives will be saved. The attempt must not be made until I give a signal. I shall cry aloud the words 'Good heart! good heart!' Remember, you have only to give this paper to your father or Marco—you understand?"

"Perfectly, perfectly." And she concealed the paper in her bosom.

Platten entered with the order. "No time to be lost," he exclaimed hurriedly. "The troops are forming; I must be back to my post."

"Come then, dearest," exclaimed Stettenheim. "Nay, one kiss," and he pressed his lips to hers. "Our last kiss," he thought; "their lives saved, but my death! You will go, dearest?" he asked her tenderly.

"Go! Oh, Max," she cried, with fervour,

“I would go with you to the end of the world.”

He led her to the cell-door, and gave the order to the jailer, who unlocked the door in obedience to the mandate.

“Enter, dearest,” said Stettenheim. “No time to be lost.”

“You will go with me, Max?”

“Impossible!”

“I dare not go alone! Oh, Max, when I leave you, that darkness comes over my mind, that fearful confusion returns.”

“You must make the effort,” he answered in despair. “Recollect what I have said. Go, for Heaven’s sake!”

In his anxiety he almost thrust her through the door. The jailer, in his jealous caution, only held the door half open; he locked it immediately upon Vittoria’s entrance, and stood in close scrutiny before the sliding-flap.

“Surely, my good fellow,” exclaimed Stettenheim, “you may venture to let a daughter bid a last farewell to her father and brother.”

“ I have my orders, Colonel.”

“ Tell me what harm can a poor feeble girl, half dead with weakness, do to your prisoners ? ”

“ I have my orders, I tell you.”

“ Come, come, but you are a man. Think now, if you were in that cell, and your own child, your own daughter, came to bid you a last farewell, would you like the eyes of a stranger to witness it ? ”

“ You have had my answer.”

“ Well, well, grant me this as a favour. Here's gold—a purse.”

“ Curse your bribes,” answered the jailer, indignantly.

“ This is no bribe,” urged Stettenheim.

“ A gift ; a trifle.”

“ You waste your words.”

“ Only name the sum you want. Five thousand florins—ten—twenty—fifty. Not a soul will know.”

“ Be silent, sir ! Another word, and I'll drag that girl out of the cell.”

Further effort was hopeless, and Stetten-

heim turned away in despair; but what bribes could not effect, the tenderness of a rough soldier's heart effected. The jailer turned away from the door.

"By all the saints!" he cried, "I can look no more." He wiped his sleeve across his eyes, and addressed Stettenheim in a gruff voice, "It's not your cursed bribes that have done it; not your money. I'll not touch one florin of that. I'm an old soldier, and I've looked death many a time in the face, but I'll not look again upon that sight in there. Baron Falkenberg may kick me from my post first."

"Good heart! good heart!" cried Stettenheim, loudly, and he grasped the man's hand; "my word for it, you shall not suffer for this act of humanity."

Moments of suspense passed, scarcely minutes, but Stettenheim judged that time enough had lapsed for the prisoners to escape from the cell. The difficulty of detecting the secret means of egress from the cell would, of course, favour their escape

if they once gained the secret staircase. Presently the soldiers filed into the ante-chamber under the command of Platten. Falkenberg then entered, and demanded the prisoners of the jailer.

“The functions of the civil power have terminated,” he exclaimed; “the prisoners are placed in your hands, Colonel von Stettenheim, for execution.”

The jailer flung open the cell door; the prisoners had not escaped. Vittoria stood on the threshold of the cell. Uttering an agonizing shriek she flew to Stettenheim for refuge. “Save me! save me!” she cried, in a voice of terror; “that dagger! he comes to murder me,” and then, in heartrending words, “Oh, Marco, Marco, I have loved you so;”—and she sank insensible into Stettenheim’s arms.

“Let the prisoners take their places in procession,” exclaimed Falkenberg, vindictively

“By your leave, sir,” said Count Contarini, in stately manner, “I would speak

a last word to Colonel von Stettenheim." And Count Contarini, followed by Marco and Count Grimani, advanced to Stettenheim, who held Vittoria folded in his arms.

"A father, with his dying words, thanks you from the bottom of his heart for the love and care you have bestowed upon his daughter; and he dies happy, at least, in the thought that she will be honoured and protected by a brave soldier and a true gentleman. He solemnly confides her to your care." He laid his hand for a moment on Vittoria's averted head. "Farewell for ever!"

"Colonel," exclaimed Marco, with broken voice, and tears in his eyes, "promise me this. Tell her some day, if her consciousness ever returns, that her brother Marco—she loved so well—died loving her; and deeply repentant of that fearful blow which your hand so mercifully turned aside. Farewell! She is the precious gift we give to you, in return for your noble conduct to us since that fatal night."

“Colonel,” cried Grimani, and he grasped Stettenheim’s hand with a generous grasp, “you have been a brave man, and a true. I shall die the happier for having met with a noble enemy. Farewell!”

The three prisoners took their places in the procession, and the order was given to march. Vittoria was, happily, unconscious. As far as brave and earnest effort had gone, Stettenheim’s conscience entirely acquitted him, and he felt at last that he was not unworthy of the precious gift bestowed upon him—that he was bound to her for ever by the strong bonds of death and sorrow.

An orderly entered with a despatch for Falkenberg from the Governor of Venice.

“A reprieve!” cried Platten hopefully.

“No reprieve,” answered Falkenberg, glancing over the despatch. “Good heavens!” he exclaimed in another moment. “Venice is surrendered to France. Amnesty for all political offences. The prisoners are released!”

“Long live Italy, free and undivided!” cried Grimani, in a loud voice.

“Long live Italy!” answered Contarini and Marco.

“Ah, Count Grimani!” exclaimed Falkenberg, “check your exultation! It is not Venice! it is not that vile secret society! it is not Italy! it is Prussia which has done this. Our failure is not your triumph.”

“Ah, Baron Falkenberg,” rejoined Grimani, “we did fail at Custozza; but we held at bay that strong army of Austria which your Benedek might have hurled on Berlin.”

Falkenberg did not renew the discussion. He retired forthwith.

Contarini and Marco came forward to Stettenheim and Vittoria.

“Vittoria,” said Stettenheim, “happy news has come—your father and brother are saved. No more cause for sorrow. Saved, to love you for evermore.”

“To love you, dearest sister,” cried

Marco. "Oh, do not turn your eyes away from me."

"It is Marco who is speaking to you," exclaimed Stettenheim, "the brother you loved so well when he was a little child."

"Oh yes, Marco," she answered with dawn of returning consciousness. "I recollect now; we used to play together all day long. Marco, Marco," she murmured, in the old tones of love.

"Merciful Heaven!" cried Contarini, "her intellect seems to return."

"This is your father, sweet one," said Stettenheim tenderly, "your father."

"My father! Oh, yes," she answered, "I remember quite well, quite well."

"Vittoria, dearest, you belong to them now; you are theirs. It is for them to guard and protect you. I must yield you up to a father's loving arms."

Stettenheim passed her gently to Contarini; Marco took her hands. She smiled upon them, and appeared to recognize them, and then her countenance changed, and she

suddenly turned away, and flew back into the arms of Stettenheim.

“No, no, Max,” she cried, in a voice of anguish, “dearest Max, do not leave me. If you leave me I shall die.”

He did not leave her, and of course in due course they were married; it needs no magician to say that; and Vittoria lived at “that castle by the river,” no matter where; but in great honour, and she was very happy; and in her husband’s mother and sister, she possessed a mother’s and a sister’s love, and in the healing power of devoted love, her soul returned in all mental health to her fair body—albeit some of the *élancement* and *verve* of her girlhood, had been lost in that terrible half hour which was the great epoch of her life. When people beheld her radiance and her beauty, most assuredly they did not wonder at her husband’s devotion; but they did not know, and only husband, mother, and sister knew, that this woman, who, in her rare perfection

of womanhood, seemed *only* a most sweet woman, had been charged with a great mission of conversion, and had succeeded to the full in her holy work.

EPILOGUE.

THE MANAGER'S SANCTUM.

“BLESS the man! where’s the low comedy? I never mentioned low comedy, hey? Confound it, sir. I thought I was dealing with a dramatist who knew his business; ‘sandwich system,’—a slice of sentiment, and a slice of fun,—everybody knows that’s the only way to write a play nowadays.

“Art! don’t talk to me about art! what’s art got to do with writing plays? Where are you to get in your low comedy? Hang it, sir, anywhere! I don’t care, nobody cares, provided you get in lots of fun somewhere. Harkee, sir, I’m proud to say that I possess a thoroughly tip-top

intellectual audience; barristers, doctors, lots of that sort; men with brains I can tell you; but their brains have been so plaguily worried all day with intellectual labour that they want to laugh in the evening; they only go to the theatre to laugh; bless you, they know it's all make believe at best, and they'd rather laugh at nothing, than cry at nothing; it's only the common people in the pit, who think it's all real, and feel the force of the illusion, and care for the poetry of the situation.

“Egad! what a chance I've given you. Venice! what does that word suggest? the mosquito—of course. Shakespeare—Immortal William, missed it entirely. I'll defy you to point out a single word about mosquitoes in the ‘Merchant of Venice,’ or ‘Othello,’ or ‘Venice Preserved.’ Confound it, sir, I hope I know that Shakespeare didn't write ‘Venice Preserved!’ I repeat, Shakespeare missed it entirely. Just consider what a magnificent idea it is—low comedy man bitten by mosquitoes! Re-

member, an intellectual audience has travelled during the autumn months; an intellectual audience has been bitten by mosquitoes; an intellectual audience has floundered in mosquito curtains, and burnt nasty pastilles; mosquitoes, through personal experience, have become a realized fact in their minds; the mosquito idea does not require to be reached through troublesome efforts of the imaginative faculty, or laboriously evolved from the inner consciousness. Gad! I can talk tall when I like!

“Mind you, I pay my first low comedian thirty pounds per week, and he’s worth it every penny with such an audience as mine, and you’ve positively cut him out of the best low comedy part ever conceived; a part, moreover, as I have clearly shown, thoroughly calculated to interest an educated public.

“What do you say?—how are you to get your low comedy man to Venice? Bless me, you had better stick to French translations, if you haven’t got more invention

than that. Why, nothing easier, Cook's excursions, of course ! Letters of introduction to Vittoria and the Austrian Colonel, there you have it, what could be more natural ? and nature is the very backbone of dramatic effect ; carpet bag, wraps, umbrellas ; sure cards every one of them. The carpet bag is the soul of comedy, if an actor knows how to use it ; the finest ' first entrance ' in the world—a sure roar of laughter ! I'll bet fifty pounds your comedy scenes will smash your sentiment all to nothing ; comic woman, of course ; a missing trunk which never turns up till the end of the play ; that's real comedy, if you like !

“ The fact is, and I always speak my opinions right out, I think your sentiment is just so much twaddle ; elevation by love and fiddlesticks—bosh ! I suppose it will do ; any sort of sentiment does nowadays, if you only make the people laugh afterwards. Egad, sir, just to think that you've managed to miss the chance of making a hit where Shakespeare failed through sheer want of

entomological knowledge. Well, short and sharp, the play's no use to me as it stands, those comic scenes must be got in somehow. Hang it! you won't? Why not? because you say it's a violation of art? Pooh, don't be absurd; I admire art as much as any man; I never miss going once a year to the Royal Academy. I'd give 'em art till all's blue, if they'd only pay for it, but if they won't, what's to be done? Man alive, do you want to ruin me as a manager? Do you want to ruin yourself as a dramatist? Consider your own children; consider my children; our wives, our homes. This question of art is a very solemn thing. No, no, my boy, art has been the ruin of thousands; let us be wise in our generation. Help yourself to the sherry, not a bad wine, hey? what they call 'nutty flavour' with extreme delicacy, and a silky finish on the palate; try another glass, old boy. I say, though, business is business all the world over; don't you think you could just manage the low comedy man with the carpet bag

and the mosquitoes ? It isn't as if mosquitoes were vulgar, I wouldn't ask you to descend to vulgarities, but of all biting things, mosquitoes are the most genteel and refined ; nothing in them to shock the susceptibilities of the most cultivated and intellectual audience ; and yet they are so brimming full of real comedy ; just fancy the low comedian's face bitten all over ; so thoroughly real, and at the same time so awfully funny ; only let my audience catch sight of that face, and the play would be as good as made. All right, old fellow, I see you'll be able to manage the carpet bag and the mosquitoes. Have a good grind at it this evening ; eleven o'clock to-morrow, sharp, for the reading to the company. Stick to the 'sandwich system,' my boy ; hang art, and you'll make a decent playwright another day, my word on it."

III.

FAITH AND LOVE.

(BASIL'S FAITH.)

BASIL'S FAITH.*



CHAPTER I.

DEEP WATERS.

THAT excellent life which many persons live who belong to the higher section of English middle-class life, had been lived by Mr. and Mrs. Bradley—an eminently respectable life, based upon successful commercial operations, supported by adequate capital—no trials, either by tension of the money market, or through unruliness of spirit or

* This story is founded on a drama of the same title. In the present inequitable condition of the law of copyright, it is necessary to state that the dramatic rights are secured by two performances of the play at Hull during the season of 1874.

flesh, had disturbed the even tenor of their career. Men rose and fell in the chances of City life; but Mr. Bradley, eschewing the temptations of speculation, persistently trod the safe path of legitimate business. Men and women rose to a high eminence of saintliness—men and women descended to the nether depths, but Mr. and Mrs. Bradley, persistently trod the safe and estimable path leading heavenwards, of churchwarden mediocrity. They had their reward,—they were growing old, and the sere and yellow leaf brought them honour, love, obedience, and troops of friends modelled in their own moral semblance—each and all persistently treading that same safe and estimable path—a daily recurrence of breakfast, luncheon, and dinner—thoroughly adequate and nourishing—sherry of golden suavity, port of fading ruby—a daily recurrence of the same ideas, social and religious—a strange intertwining of these ideas—everything is sacred to a churchwarden! Life without a battle, but life without a victory.

At last the trumpet sounded, and the battle began. Mr. and Mrs. Bradley lived in a very comfortable villa at Twickenham, the garden of which sloped down to the river. Our story commences on the morning of the 1st of September, 1873. As a rule, Mr. Bradley was always the first of the family to enter the breakfast-room. Breakfast was laid in a cosy, pleasant room, half library, half ordinary sitting-room, which opened into the garden. Mr. Bradley's mind was ill at ease as he stood before a small table, examining with rueful countenance a very perfect breech-loader by Westley Richards, wiping the barrel with the most loving care. "Confound my old legs," he murmured, "they won't stand the work! Confound that infernal '34,—I laid it down in my youth to floor me in my old age—improvidence of youth! Oh, for one sniff of the turnips—one long delicious sniff! That crispy green crunching under the boots—sparkling with dew—quivering with excitement. Oh, hang these breech-loaders!

they are very pretty, but they have no mercy on a man's legs or a man's breath: 'down charge!' Well, it was breathing time—perhaps it was sport."

Mr. Bradley's recollections of old-fashioned sport were interrupted by the entrance of Martha, the confidential maid, and indeed, by virtue of long and faithful service, well-nigh the mistress of Mr. and Mrs. Bradley, and of the entire household. Martha placed a travelling-bag on the table close to the gun-case.

"Well, Martha, is the boy ready? Portmanteau packed? Everything all right, hey?"

"The portmanteau's right enough, sir—I packed it myself. I wouldn't trust any one else to touch it."

"Then of course it's all right?"

"No, sir, it isn't; it's very far from being all right. The fact is, Master Basil——"

"Martha, do try to say *Mister* Basil. Remember, he's of age these last three years."

"I do try to say *Mister* Basil, sir, but I can't quite manage it. I'm sorry to say that Master Basil says he won't go."

"Not go!—the first of September!" exclaimed Mr. Bradley with amazement.

"When I went to call him this morning, there he was, dear young gentleman, sitting up in his dressing-gown, all of a daze like. I know what's what," Martha added, with significant gesture. "I've told missus all about it. I know he ought to go—he's no business to stop another day in this house."

"His father's house, Martha?"

"Not another day, sir, begging your pardon—while *she* remains here, and that's the plain truth."

"Martha," said Mr. Bradley, with severe tone, "never let me hear you utter another wicked word of that sort. Have you women no charity one for another? Understand, once for all, as long as Mrs. Milburn remains in this house, no one shall question her conduct."

"It's no business of mine, sir; she won't

hurt my character. It's only on Master Basil's account that I care—he's a young man, and she——”

“Martha!”

Martha prudently retired.

“Head of one's house,” thought Mr. Bradley, with a feeling of self-abasement, “freeholder, but not head—wagepayer, but not master—husband, but not lord. For the first time in my life I've tried to perform a generous action at a certain cost—tried to stand up against the world on behalf of a defenceless woman, hounded down by lies and calumny, but the world beats me—the world, leagued with wife, and servants, and neighbours, and that grim prude, respectability. Ah, there's nothing left to a man of sixty-five but cowardice. Port wine's about the limit of his free will, and even there his will mustn't be too free.”

Basil Bradley entered the room in shooting garb—as pleasant a looking young Englishman as might be seen in a day's journey, but serious withal beyond his years, and

bearing a stamp of methodical business habit. In point of appearance and bearing, the very sort of son for Mr. and Mrs. Bradley to idolize and worship—the very sort of young man to tread that same safe and estimable path which they had trodden.

“Basil, my boy, how late you are ! ”

“Time enough, sir. Where’s the money article ? ” he replied, snatching up the *Times* and scanning it eagerly.

“The money article ! Confound it, Basil—the birds—the birds ! ”

“Yes, yes, the birds ; but business is business, father.”

“Not on the first of September ! I thought you had arranged everything for a holiday.”

“So I had ; but it’s no use taking a holiday if your mind won’t give you one.”

“Bless me, Basil. Why, at one time you were never happy without a gun in your hands.”

“I was mad for sport then ; I’m mad for money now.”

“Haven’t you enough, my boy?”

“The zest of making it—not the money; the emulation—my head pitted against a thousand clever heads.”

“Gambling, Basil.”

“Well, it’s not the turf, father. You were afraid of that at one time. I do love horses, though. I wish men had as little vice.”

“Come, put down the paper, and get ahead with breakfast; they’ll begin the day without you.”

“I *must* wait for a telegram from the office. Any more about that wretched business?”

“Tom Milburn sticks to his text. I declare I’m half puzzled.”

“I’m not! It’s as clear as day,” replied Basil, with vehemence. “Tom Milburn is an infernal blackguard!”

“Gently, my boy, gently—the proofs he holds against her conduct.”

“Proofs! I don’t believe in proofs,” answered Basil. “I believe in people.

Isn't Tom Milburn a blackguard, and a liar to boot ? ”

“ Granted.”

“ Isn't Clara Milburn a noble, pure-hearted woman ? ”

“ I think she is, but I can't prove it.”

“ Prove it ? no ; but I believe it—faith ! ”

“ A man of business,” said Mr. Bradley, with a smile, “ and he talks of faith.”

“ Why, father, men walk by faith in the City—golden promises, golden plausibilities—proofs ! no proof but faith ; the error consists in being gulled by liars. Proof is no proof without an honest man to vouch it. Tom Milburn is a scoundrel, I'll vouch for that.”

“ Well, I can't tell what a jury will say to your theory,” replied Mr. Bradley, with a shrug of the shoulders.

“ Good heavens, father ! it won't come to that ? ”

“ It will come to that, my boy.”

“ What, all those vile liars arrayed against her in that horrible Divorce Court ? ”

“She shall have the best legal advice money can procure.”

“We can give that to criminals, father; but the shame will kill her.”

“Hush, Basil, here’s your mother.” And Mrs. Bradley hurried into the room, full of maternal solicitude for her son.

“Making a good breakfast, Basil, I do hope; it will be such a hot, fatiguing day.” And Mrs. Bradley seated herself at the breakfast-table. “Papa, dear, is he making a good breakfast?”

“Nonsense, Maria, the boy’s old enough to know what to eat.”

“I don’t care about his age—it’s his breakfast. Basil, dear, you *must* support yourself.”

“All right, mother, I am supporting myself.”

“You’ll give our kindest remembrances to Mr. and Mrs. Woodford?” said Mrs. Bradley, with marked emphasis; “and mind, Basil, you are to give my best love to Margaret Woodford—she’s a great favourite of mine.”

"You've often said so, mother."

"A charming, sensible girl, thoroughly well brought up; no fiddle-de-dee sentiment and pack o' nonsense about her. Good religious parents—excellent examples for a young girl."

"Oh yes, Margaret Woodford's well enough," replied Basil, calmly.

"She's a great deal better than that," pursued Mrs. Bradley. "I only wish I could induce you to think so. Mind, you're to tell her from me, that I've been wanting her to stay with us these last three months, and now I declare the summer's gone."

"Why didn't you ask her before?" inquired Basil, with some surprise.

"How could I ask a young girl to this house?"

"Why not, mother?"

"I can only tell you, Basil—and your own common sense will tell you the reason—if I had a daughter of my own, nothing should induce me to let her remain in this house."

“My love! my love!” exclaimed Mr. Bradley, in deprecatory tone.

“It’s the fact, Mr. Bradley. It’s very hard for me; I’ve never been ashamed before now to ask people to my house.”

“Oh, mother, mother!”

“No, Basil; I was brought up as a girl ought to be brought up. I trust I have never forgotten my early training. I trust I have always taught you a proper sense of right and wrong.”

“Yes, mother, of right and wrong; and I tell you from the bottom of my heart, that you did what was quite right, when you afforded an honourable asylum under your own roof, to a lady who has been shamefully treated.”

“I’ve no word to say in favour of Tom Milburn,” persisted Mrs. Bradley, “but, at the same time, there are people who take his part; and you know perfectly well, Basil, there is not a single house at the present moment where Clara Milburn would be received.”

"The greater honour to us, mother, that we receive her here."

"She has infatuated you in her favour," retorted Mrs. Bradley, in acrimonious tone, "I can see that plainly enough."

"Mother, dear," answered Basil, with serious and earnest expression, "you can't suppose for a moment that I care for Clara Milburn—Tom Milburn's wife—absurd notion; but I tell you plainly, I do care for the shameful way she has been treated: I do care that she should be the victim of lies and calumny: I do care that her only child, almost a baby, should be wrested from her: I do care, because I believe she is good, and true, and noble; and I mean to stick up for her through thick and thin."

Basil was interrupted for the moment, by the entrance from the garden of Captain Seton—a young man, senior to Basil by three or four years—the nephew of a neighbour and intimate friend of the Bradleys. Basil laid eager hands on Seton, and drew him forward into the controversy.

"We are talking about Mrs. Milburn, Seton. I want you to assure my mother of your faith in her honourable conduct. They know you were engaged to Mrs. Milburn long before this miserable marriage with my cousin. Tell them your confidence in Mrs. Milburn's conduct."

"Mrs. Milburn has been shamefully wronged by her husband," replied Seton. "I'm fully convinced of her entire innocence."

"Bravo! Tell them that Clara Milburn is not the woman to whom a man would dare to utter a dishonourable word."

Seton replied with some slight hesitation, "Certainly, certainly;" and, turning to Mrs. Bradley, remarked, with a smile, that Basil was a doughty champion.

"So are you, Seton," retorted Basil, half in jest and half in earnest. "By Heaven! if ordeal by battle wasn't over, there would be two lances in the field; and I know a third, if it were needful. You'd couch a lance, father, wouldn't you, even if you

had to do battle in your slippers and dressing-gown? By Jove! a fellow could fight for his faith in those days, and lay about him, and leave the verdict to Heaven!"

"Dark ages of superstition!" exclaimed Mr. Bradley; "we leave it now to twelve jurymen, selected by blind chance. Well, suiting my chivalry to the practice of the age, I've placed the whole matter in the hands of our neighbour, the eminent ecclesiastical lawyer, Dr. Manley; he's an old schoolfellow of mine, and will advise me as a friend. I shall be greatly governed by his opinion."

"I shan't!" exclaimed Basil.

"Why?" inquired Mr. Bradley.

"Because his opinion, I'll bet fifty to one, will be adverse. I *know* the proofs are against her."

"Basil, I declare it's perfectly distressing to hear you talk in this absurd strain," said Mrs. Bradley, with evident vexation.

"He must think as he likes," replied Mr. Bradley; "it's no use arguing with

him on these terms. And now, once for all, let this conversation cease."

"The secret of my popping in upon you at this early hour," said Seton, in a tone of apology, "is that my uncle wants to bother Basil with another question about those dreadful mining shares."

"What, is he still hankering after those wretched things?" exclaimed Basil. "I've proved to him half a dozen times——"

"Proved!" exclaimed Mr. Bradley.

"Yes, father; proved the directors a pack of scoundrels. I can't analyze copper ore, but I can tell what men are made of."

"He's bent upon taking the shares," said Seton.

"He shan't do it!" replied Basil, with energy.

"I wish you could give him a couple of minutes as you drive past," continued Seton; "he always listens to you."

"The mare's so fresh, she won't stand a moment. Here, I'll run across the gardens—it won't take ten minutes."

“ Shall I order the dog-cart to be ready for you when you return ? ” inquired Mrs. Bradley, as Basil rose to leave.

“ When I come back, mother, will be time enough. I can't be sure of going till I get the telegram.” And Basil hurried off to save Mr. Seton from entering upon his rash speculation.

“ I can assure you,” said Seton, “ that my uncle is always praising Basil ; he says he's the best man of business in the world—hard-headed, practical.”

“ So he is,” replied Mrs. Bradley ; “ all but that crotchet about this unfortunate affair.” At this moment the servant entered with a card on the salver for Mr. Bradley.

“ Well, my love,” said Mr. Bradley, glancing at the card, “ we shall soon know the best or the worst of it. Dr. Manley is good enough to call upon me—not seeing me at church yesterday, I suppose.”

“ I only beg one thing,” said Mrs. Bradley. “ Promise me that Dr. Manley's advice shall govern our course for the future.”

“Certainly, my dear,” replied Mr. Bradley, with an assumption of firmness; and he left the room.

“I wish you clearly to understand, Captain Seton,” observed Mrs. Bradley, “that I thoroughly sympathise with Mrs. Milburn in her very unfortunate position; and, of course, if I were not thoroughly convinced in my own mind, of the perfect rectitude of her conduct, I should not allow her to remain in this house another moment.”

“Quite so, Mrs. Bradley,” replied Seton.

“It’s in vain to deny the prejudice of the world in such cases,” continued Mrs. Bradley, “and I’m old-fashioned enough to say that it is a very wholesome prejudice. Mothers will not bring their daughters to this house, and I don’t blame them.”

“I know the strong social feeling on the point,” observed Seton, “for I’m always fighting it.”

“It really is very unpleasant,” continued Mrs. Bradley, “to see one’s neighbours looking askance at one. I declare some-

times I can't bear to go to church, and I was always brought up from a child, to a strict performance of my religious duties; and then there are the servants—really *they* ought to have a proper example shown them by their superiors.” At this moment Martha entered the room. “Well, Martha, what's the matter?”

Martha approached her mistress, and said a few words, which were inaudible to Captain Seton.

“Oh yes, Martha, she can come now,” replied Mrs. Bradley, in a tone of irritation.

Martha left the room; and Captain Seton readily surmised, that mistress and maid were in league, to prevent as far as possible Basil Bradley from being in the company of Clara Milburn.

“Of course, Captain Seton,” continued Mrs. Bradley, “I say all this in confidence; but it's no use blinding one's eyes to the fact that this is a most unfortunate affair both for Mrs. Milburn and ourselves, and all the more so on Basil's account.”

Clara Milburn entered the room—quietly, very quietly, as if with purpose to shroud herself away. She was about three-and-twenty; elegant, lithe figure; sweet, interesting face, but darkened with sad expression. Mrs. Bradley received her with marked ceremony and distance of manner.

“Good morning, Mrs. Milburn. Captain Seton, an old friend of yours, I know.”

Clara’s face flushed when she perceived the presence of Captain Seton; and bowing coldly, she bent her eyes to the ground.

“May I offer you some tea? I’m afraid it’s rather cold.”

“It will be very nice, thank you, Mrs. Bradley;” and Clara took her seat at the table. “A lovely day for the first of September,” she remarked, forcing herself to talk; “I hope Basil will have good sport.”

“My son isn’t certain even now whether he can get away from business.”

“What a pity!”

“Basil is devoted to his duty, Mrs. Milburn; no shooting or anything else can

divert him from that ; duty is one of the cardinal principles of life."

Martha entered the room, and spoke to Mrs. Bradley.

" Oh, your master wishes to see me in the study, does he ? I must ask you to excuse my leaving the breakfast-table, Mrs. Milburn ; Mr. Bradley desires to see me on business."

And, with a stately inclination of the head, Mrs. Bradley left the room, followed by Martha. Clara Milburn and Captain Seton were alone.

The flush again mantled her face ; she started up, and glanced at him for a moment with scornful expression.

" So, Captain Seton—— "

" Clara ! "

" Not Clara !—Mrs. Milburn. You have dared to come here for my answer to the letter you gave me last night. It's burnt ! I have suffered very much," she continued, in agitated voice, " suffered the horrible anguish of unjust accusation—accusation

supported by diabolical ingenuity—but that letter of yours has dealt me the hardest blow. We were younger than we are now when you asked me to be your wife—*younger*, but I think you knew the meaning of your offer.”

“You know I did,” he exclaimed, passionately.

“You meant it as the highest honour you could pay to the girl you loved—you felt she was worthy of the highest honour.”

“I did!”

“And now——Oh, she has sunk so low in your estimation that you dare write to her that shameful letter—‘fly with you to India!’”

“Listen to me!”

“To me first,” she answered, with vehemence. “Oh, you must have greatly changed, or your hand would have paused ere it penned those words!—Oh, worse than insult, a drying up of all source of faith and hope! What faith or hope is left, if those who should believe in me

have turned faithless? if one who has known me from girlhood—one who has loved me—believes me worthy of this shameful offer? Is this that *beau idéal* I worshipped at seventeen?" she added, in a tone of bitter contempt.

"By Heaven, I love you now as then!"

"Not now as then!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "Oh! think what you could have done for me had that love been a true, noble, enduring love! you, coming back from India, fresh to our circle, you could have said to me, 'Clara Milburn, I know these vile stories are base lies; have confidence—I believe in your innocence. I knew you as a girl, as a playmate; the whole thing is monstrous, impossible.' Oh, think what strength those words would have given me to face the world—to defy those accursed lies!"

"I have said all this to the world," he answered.

"But not to me," she rejoined, scornfully. "No, Mark Seton. In your own heart *you*

have condemned me, and joined my enemies in secret, using empty mouthings of confidence before the world."

"These are bitter words, Mrs. Milburn; nevertheless I shall be true when all the world has turned aside."

"Oh, let it turn, I care not; I have a safe refuge here. My own husband's relations have declared their perfect faith in my innocence, and they have proved their faith by giving me an honourable asylum in their house."

"They have, certainly," answered Seton, in a doubtful tone.

"Would Mrs. Bradley have anything to do with a person in whose character she had not entire confidence?"

"No, but——"

"But what?"

"There is such a thing as wearing out a welcome," said Seton, significantly.

"Not in a case like mine," rejoined Clara, vehemently. "Their house *must* be my home while this charge hangs over my

head; they feel that—they feel that to send me away would be an act of utter condemnation.”

“Can you honestly tell me that Mrs. Bradley does not begin to tire of your presence?”

“Oh, well, she may at times be rather impatient—rather cold, even; but that’s only on the surface. We are none of us quite perfect. Of course I try to give as little trouble as possible—keep myself to myself; but she could never send me away while she has confidence in my character. No, no! impossible! Heaven would never permit that. Then you know Mr. Bradley——”

“Mr. Bradley does not govern here,” interrupted Seton, with marked emphasis.

“Perhaps in little things,” replied Clara; “but in great matters a man is master of his own house; and I am sure his sense of justice——”

“And Basil Bradley—that eminently good young man?”

“Basil Bradley! I scarcely ever see him,” answered Clara. “Besides, he’s immersed in business, morning to night.”

“Do you think they contrive to keep him away from you?”

“No, no, no! absurd!”

“That Martha; that confidential cat, Martha?”

“Quite a mistake—quite a mistake, I assure you.”

“Then I am mistaken,” said Seton, with significant gesture.

“You are indeed mistaken,” replied Clara. “It’s very cruel of you to talk in this strain;” and tears rose in her eyes, for deny it as she might, she felt he was telling the bitter truth.

“Cruel! Heaven forbid!” exclaimed Seton. “All I desire is to open your eyes to the true state of things in this house. Prepare yourself; the end will come far quicker than you deem. Dr. Manley is now here, in conference with Mr. and Mrs. Bradley.”

"Dr. Manley here! they've not sent for me!" she exclaimed, with surprise.

"Dr. Manley is not here on *your* account, but on *theirs*—not for your justification, but for theirs in retaining you here."

"No, no! I tell you a thousand times, no! You talk in vain when you try to shake my faith in these good, true friends. They must be true. My child has been taken from me. There must be *some* mercy left on earth. No woman could ever be permitted to stand alone against such fearful odds."

"Blind yourself with that faith, if you will," replied Seton, in ironical voice. "Dr. Manley must needs declare in no undecided tone his confidence in your cause, or you leave this house. Mrs. Bradley will send you away,—and then?"

"And then I shall be without one friend in the world."

"One friend," urged Seton.

"Not one! Leave me, Captain Seton."

She turned from him with contempt and

scorn, but he felt he was only baffled for the time. He knew that Mrs. Bradley was doing her best to favour his cause—to drive Clara Milburn through sheer desperation into his arms. Mr. and Mrs. Bradley entered the room. The interview with Dr. Manley was over; he was assured it could only have one ending, and he retired into the garden in full confidence of future victory.

Clara flew to Mr. Bradley as soon as he entered the room.

“You’ve seen Dr. Manley? Oh! will they let me have my child—will they—will they?” she exclaimed, with piteous vehemence.

“You mustn’t excite yourself, my dear,” said Mr. Bradley, kindly.

“I won’t; but Mabel—Mabel,” she gasped eagerly.

“We must talk over matters quietly,” observed Mr. Bradley, evasively. “My dear Mrs. Milburn, Dr. Manley——”

“Oh, but tell me about Mabel first——”

“My dear, I regret to say that Dr.

Manley has not pronounced any opinion upon that point."

"But that was the point," she cried, in agonized voice; "my very life-blood, my child!"

"You see," said Mr. Bradley, "that Dr. Manley only called upon us as an old friend. Mr. Jackson, our family lawyer, will see him professionally in a few days——"

"But Mabel—Mabel!" she exclaimed, in accents of despair, and burst into tears.

"Do oblige me by putting a little restraint upon your feelings," said Mrs. Bradley. "We can't do impossibilities; we are trying to do the best we can."

Clara Milburn felt, from the hard, unsympathetic tone of the voice, that Mrs. Bradley had pronounced her condemnation. Captain Seton's words were fast coming true.

"I have got to tell you," said Mr. Bradley, speaking with great hesitation, "that Dr. Manley considers—or rather that he thinks on the whole—or perhaps all

things considered—that it would, or rather might, be better if you were somewhat nearer Mr. Jackson's office."

"Nearer Mr. Jackson's office!" exclaimed Clara, almost dumbfounded.

"Yes, my dear—rather nearer," repeated Mr. Bradley; "lodgings, you understand."

"Yes, I understand," replied Clara, in faint voice. She sank back in her chair—she felt that her condemnation was finally pronounced.

"We shall take every care of her, shan't we, Mrs. Bradley?" Mr. Bradley endeavoured to assume a cheerful manner.

"Certainly, Mr. Bradley; certainly!"

"We thought of Martha's sister," pursued Mr. Bradley, "near Bloomsbury Square. Oh, come in, Martha, if that's you." It was Martha, and she did come in; it had been arranged that she should do so. "You say your sister's drawing-room floor is disengaged?"

"Yes, sir."

"You must know, my dear," continued

Mr. Bradley, addressing Mrs. Milburn, "that Martha's sister was formerly in service here."

"Yes, sir—please—ten years," exclaimed Martha, in dignified tone. "Then married from this house : and now she's a respectable widow ; pays rent and rates regular."

"It won't seem like being away from us altogether," observed Mr. Bradley, in a kindly tone ; "will it, my dear ?"

"Oh no, Mr. Bradley ; certainly not !" replied Clara, shuddering at his words.

"Martha will go up to town this morning," said Mrs. Bradley, "and make all the arrangements with her sister ; and Mrs. Milburn will be able to go up in the evening in our brougham, after it has taken us to the Sharps."

"A very good arrangement !" exclaimed Mr. Bradley. "You know, my dear, we shall pay for everything."

"Thank you, Mr. Bradley ; thank you !" And sick at heart, scarcely realizing the terrible position in which she was placed,

she turned from him and sank into a chair.

"Well, come," muttered Mr. Bradley, "it's a mercy it's over. Poor thing! she takes it in very good part. Manley's wrong; I'm sure he is. I'm a coward—coward! Port wine, port wine!" and Mr. Bradley wiped his eyes and his glasses. He would have liked to say some more kind words to Mrs. Milburn. He lingered near her, but the words stuck in his throat. Basil's entrance was a great relief.

"You never will be in time, my boy!"

"I certainly shan't," replied Basil, looking at a telegram; "I must go up to town, after all."

"No, Basil!" exclaimed Mr. Bradley, in a tone of regret.

"The telegram says 'Yes.' I shall do what I can to catch the 'one o'clock' from Waterloo, and then take a fly over from Chertsey. Good morning, Mrs. Milburn. I didn't see you for the moment."

She rose from her chair. "Good morn-

ing, Basil; you must allow me also to say good-bye!"

"Good-bye?" he exclaimed, with astonishment.

"Yes, I am going to leave you this evening."

"Going to leave us?"

"I'm sure it's time for my long visit to come to an end," she said, striving to hide her anguish with a smile.

"Nonsense, Mrs. Milburn."

"It's necessary for me to be in town, near the lawyer."

"Who says that?" asked Basil.

"Dr. Manley advises it."

"Dr. Manley!" exclaimed Basil, with warmth.

"The fact is," said Mr. Bradley, intervening, "you see, Basil——"

"Yes, father," he replied, with emphasis, "I see; I *see*!" but he said no more, and his manner lapsed into its usual phlegmatic state.

"Allow me to thank you," said Clara,

addressing Basil, in trembling voice, "for all your attention to me."

"Don't mention it, Mrs. Milburn," he replied, bluntly; "don't mention it. Well then, if it must be so, good-bye!" He shook the hand she offered him, but he threw no warmth into his grasp. His manner appeared even more than usually cold and indifferent; in fact, just the sort of manner Mrs. Milburn was prepared to expect—the manner of a hard-headed, practical man of business, full of business thoughts, starting, as of daily custom, for his London work.

"You'll lose your train, Basil!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradley, catching at any excuse to prevent her son from conversing with Mrs. Milburn.

"Time enough, mother!" And Basil, after a few business remarks to his father, went towards the garden. Seton met him on the threshold.

"Settled matters with my uncle?" inquired Seton.

"I've knocked that share mania out of his head!" replied Basil, with a good deal of emphasis.

"A thousand thanks, old boy; and now you're off to the birds?"

"No; to London first; perhaps the birds in the afternoon."

"One moment, Basil!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradley, following her son to the window. "Don't forget my best love to Margaret Woodford. I shall write to her to-day, to ask her to stay with us next week."

Mr. and Mrs. Bradley stood together watching their son as he hurried down the garden; they loved him so much! they were so proud of him! he was such a good young man! he had never given them a single moment's anxiety! But when Mrs. Bradley looked at her son, and thought of what women are capable of becoming—thought of the many cunning pitfalls which fair lithe hands can dig! of the nets woven in finest mesh by deft white fingers! then her heart misgave her: and in her maternal

love and fear, she hated her own sex most thoroughly, and she wished, as fervently as wished the old ascetics of desert, cave, and pillar,—that women were utterly uprooted from the economy of life.

Seton passed into the room, and quietly approached the chair where Clara Milburn was sitting, with head bent over the table, and her hands clasped over her face.

“The end has come,” she murmured;
“not one friend—not one!”

CHAPTER II.

ON THE THRESHOLD.

THE battle that Mr. Bradley fought on that first day of September, 1873, was not fought in the open country in the sight of men—it was fought in the recesses, wheresoever they have local habitation, of his own conscience—so, as far as the outside world was concerned, there would be no shout of victory and no shame of defeat; but none the less in that same conscience of his, would be felt the silent thrill of moral triumph, or the chill sense of shameful discomfiture. Mr. Bradley's battle, the one battle of his life, ended in defeat.

The more he reflected upon all he knew of Mrs. Milburn's character, the more he

considered the modest, blameless tenor of her life since she had resided under his roof, the more improbable appeared the charges alleged against her by a wicked and vicious husband, and consequently the greater the justice and duty, of affording her an asylum in his family. But against this sense of justice and duty, was arrayed the strong feeling of expediency—it was decidedly *expedient* that she should go. Mrs. Bradley had so ruled it, and society supported Mrs. Bradley; could he be fairly called upon to draw the sword against his wife and society in combination? Then again on religious grounds, and Mr. Bradley was not a man to ignore religion, in its relations to secular conduct, the course of action was very fairly clear. Mr. Bradley's theology was mainly of a prudential nature; the grand precedents for a defiance of the world, in the cause of duty and justice, did not appear in his mind pertinent to the subject in debate; but it did appear that the right of a wife to select the inmates of her house was very

conclusively established by the precedent of Abraham and Hagar. Besides all this, he might chance to be wrong, and Mrs. Bradley right in her estimate of facts, in which case the expulsion of Mrs. Milburn would become a positive duty to themselves, their son, and society; and then, after all, putting it at the worst, he would remain passive—the error of action, if error it were, would rest on Mrs. Bradley's shoulders, not on his. So Mr. Bradley gave up the fight, struck his flag, and surrendered to expediency, and he laid the flattering unction of sophistical extenuation thick upon his soul; but none the less in his heart of hearts, did he feel that Mrs. Milburn was innocent; and that he, John Bradley, Esquire, with moneys, divers and sundry, at due interest in safe and prudent investments, with all the esteem and respect of the world—nay, with the positive approval of the world in the act he was about to permit—was nothing better than a mere cowardly, contemptible being, scarcely worthy of the name of man.

Mrs. Bradley's battle, on the other hand, might be called a victory ; it was splendid and soul-stirring in all the attributes of triumph—splendid in self-confidence, splendid in the conviction of a righteous cause ! Alas ! this conviction was only built upon prejudice ; anxiety on behalf of Basil ; fear of the world ; and that womanly power, which has not been entirely denied to men, of converting false inferences into absolute facts. Dr. Manley's friendly words of caution were clear proofs of this woman's guilt—clear proofs of the just condemnation of society—could anything more be required ? What ! a woman of this character an inmate of her house ? oh, dire infection ! beyond all power of disinfectants—a woman of this character holding daily intercourse with her son ! striving insidiously, no doubt, to ingratiate herself with a young man of total inexperience in the wiles of women—a young man endowed with a generous and even a Quixotic soul ! So the inference being accepted as an incontrovertible fact, the

consequences of the fact accumulated with frightful rapidity. Mrs. Bradley was almost panic-stricken with visions of the terrible dangers, moral and otherwise, that beset her son. Thank Heaven, the woman was to leave that very evening! Mr. Bradley had faithfully promised her that much; and she, on her part, had promised a scant and grudging courtesy to Mrs. Milburn, for the few hours she was to remain in the house.

Thus it was throughout that day with husband and wife; nevertheless, both in Mr. Bradley's shameful defeat, and Mrs. Bradley's delusive victory, lay the seeds of a bitter repentance.

It had been arranged that Mr. and Mrs. Bradley were to spend a friendly evening with their neighbours the Sharps: they were about to start, when the maid, a young girl who had been accustomed to attend on Mrs. Milburn, entered the room with a request from that lady, that she might be permitted to see Mr. and Mrs. Bradley before they left for the evening.

“I’ll ring for you, Jane,” said Mrs. Bradley; and Jane left the room. “I suppose we must see her?”

“You may, Maria; I *won’t*.”

“You needn’t speak with such emphasis, Mr. Bradley; I really think it would be kind. I don’t want to appear harsh while she remains here.”

“No! Hang it, Maria,” replied Mr. Bradley, with increased emphasis, “I *must* be spared this. I can’t face her, and that’s the truth of it.”

“Nonsense.”

“If I believed in Dr. Manley’s opinion, I’d see her at once; but I don’t believe in it. The more I think the matter over, the more convinced am I of her innocence.”

“Marvellous incredulity!”

“Be that as it may, with this faith strong in me, I have agreed to her being sent away, knowing full well that this act in the eyes of the world means our condemnation: that’s why I can’t see her. I shall be in my study, engaged there; mind, she’s

not to come to me. I shall be ready when you are ready."

Mr. Bradley left the room. There was a certain point in minor matters, at which he was capable of becoming doggedly obstinate, and Mrs. Bradley felt that that point had been reached.

Clara Milburn had nerved herself to make one last appeal for mercy—nerved herself to encounter once more the cruel words of Mrs. Bradley; she had crushed down with violent effort the pride of her heart, which was counselling her with fierce counsel to set Mrs. Bradley at defiance, and repay scorn with scorn. A dangerous guide, and she knew it; she saw clearly whither such counsel tended, and she shuddered at the terrible sight. Nay, nay: humility must be her friend—long suffering endurance must be her counsellor: surely her last earnest prayer for countenance and support would be crowned with success.

She entered the room with beating heart and trembling steps. Mrs. Bradley's manner

was sadly cold and distant. Could there be any hope?

“Well, Mrs. Milburn, we were about to start, but at your request I have remained to see you.”

“But—Mr. Bradley?” she asked, eagerly.

“He declines seeing you again.”

“At last he has come to believe in those lies!”

“I don’t say that,” replied Mrs. Bradley, evasively; “you leave us simply because Dr. Manley advises it.”

“I feel I must have been a great burden to you,” urged Clara; “but if you could only know the value of your support to me. Every word, every act, acquired a tenfold significance—mere trifles to an ordinary guest, stood to me as vouchers of faith and confidence.” And then in tones of greater vehemence: “I swear to you I am innocent! Oh, bear with me a little longer—don’t send me away until after that trial——”

“Really, Mrs. Milburn, I am not accustomed to this excitement.”

“Oh, Mrs. Bradley, do give me one word of kindness! I'm too weak to battle it out and defy the world without some support. Oh, for one blessed word of confidence! If you could only realize the fearful position in which I stand—cast out of the pale of respectability, no protection, no safeguard; the last friends shunning me as a vile thing; nothing to hope from respectable persons but contempt and scorn.”

Mrs. Bradley endeavoured to change the issue. “You do me great injustice,” she observed; “I have never despised or scorned you. I trust I never despise or scorn any one; really, if you keep talking in this exaggerated strain, my palpitations will come on, I know they will; try to be calmer, pray.”

Calm in the midst of a terrible struggle—oh, bitter mockery!—with one last, despairing effort, Clara threw herself at Mrs. Bradley's feet. “Say you believe me guilty; say you believe—knowing me as you do—that those monstrous stories are

credible, and I will not utter another word of importunity. Oh, Mrs. Bradley, you cannot say so—you cannot say so! have mercy and patience, then, for a little longer!” and she clung to Mrs. Bradley with fervent grasp.

Ere this, Mrs. Bradley had never beheld human nature in its phase of passion and despair, the dark storms of life had never clouded her easy, placid existence; she did really feel very uncomfortable, and rather alarmed. In a weak, sentimental manner, she was deeply moved by Clara’s appeal; not by its justice, but by her own uneasiness of soul. At this critical moment, however, the balance was thrown into the adverse scale by the return of Martha.

Martha’s presence completely restored Mrs. Bradley’s moral force. “Here’s Martha, Mrs. Milburn; we must hear what she’s done.”

Clara started to her feet; she felt that the presence of that woman sealed her doom.

“ Well, Martha, you’ve had a long day ? ”
said Mrs. Bradley, briskly.

“ Yes, ma’am.”

“ You’ve arranged with your sister about Mrs. Milburn ? ”

“ Sister sends her respectful duty to you and master—there’s few things she wouldn’t do on her knees if you asked her—but—” and Martha hesitated significantly—“ her apartments are engaged.”

The colour flew into Clara’s face, but with resolute effort she held her peace.

“ Then what have you done, Martha ? ”

“ Me and sister tramped about all day ; at last we found just the very place, six doors lower down—Mrs. Jenkins’s.”

“ Your sister knows Mrs. Jenkins ? ”
inquired Mrs. Bradley.

“ Oh yes, ma’am ; goes to the same chapel—if anything she’s more prayerful than sister—but is just now rather short in rent and rates.”

“ You’ve taken Mrs. Jenkins’s drawing-room ? ”

“Yes, ma’am, by the week.”

“Mrs. Milburn will go to town directly our brougham returns,” said Mrs. Bradley, with decision. “You needn’t wait, Martha, I’m sure you must be tired.”

Martha left the room, rejoicing in her own mind that she had prevented Mrs. Milburn from disgracing her sister’s house.

“Oh, Mrs. Bradley! is there no hope? must I leave this house?”

But Clara felt there was no hope; her voice had lost its force, and Mrs. Bradley was no longer alarmed or disturbed.

“Everything is arranged, Mrs. Milburn. I wish you could have gone to Mrs. Johnson’s, but——”

“I am evidently not fit to go there,” replied Clara, reproachfully; her manner was fast changing under the influence of despair.

“Don’t blame me, Mrs. Milburn. You see your conduct has closed nearly every respectable house against you——”

“Those lies have. You don’t believe them, but you fear them.”

Mrs. Bradley felt the necessity of an uncompromising vindication of her own conduct.

"If you will force me to speak out, I do believe you are not a fit person to remain in this house."

"Enough, Mrs. Bradley," replied Clara, with bitter emphasis; "I am *not* a fit person to remain here. I will detain you no longer. Good evening;" and she turned from Mrs. Bradley with proud gesture.

"Well, Mrs. Milburn, really! Oh, well, good evening! I wish you well," and Mrs. Bradley left the room.

Clara Milburn flung herself upon the sofa. Mr. and Mrs. Bradley's brougham drove away. It was all over; the lies had won the victory; the last stronghold was stormed. She was cast out to fight the hard fight to the end with her own weak hands. "Oh, merciful Heaven!" she cried, "can it be permitted? What! left to stand alone?—left to face the world's contempt without

the faith of one single soul, to cast a ray of help and confidence on my failing heart? Alone, circled with scorn! Oh, dreary hours—dreary days! No love to cling to for support; not even that baby face—that face pure as an angel's—that face holy with innocence—that guardian angel of a mother's heart! Oh, devilish iniquity to drag her from my arms! Her weakness, my strength; her feebleness, my fortitude; her smile, my consolation! No: alone now—condemned!”

Captain Seton stole in cautiously by the window entrance. “Clara,” he whispered.

She started up. “You here!” she exclaimed, with indignation. “I told you I would not see you again!”

“It shall be for the last time!”

“I say, no!”

“I will—I must speak!” he answered.

“I will not hear you!” She went towards the door, but he barred her progress. “Let me go, Captain Seton!” She drew back from him towards the fire-

place. "This is shameful. If you compel me, I'll ring the bell for the servant to show you out."

"One moment, for Heaven's sake!" he exclaimed.

"Is your love for me," she asked, with indignation, "so merciless, that you can compromise me in this reckless way?"

"No danger is incurred, Clara. I am free to come in and out of this house as I like. Oh, bear with me now! it shall be the last time."

"Speak, then, for the last time."

"You were forced into that wicked marriage?"

"I was."

"You were engaged to me?"

"I was."

"He has cast you off—driven you from society—traded your character!"

"Why these facts?" she asked impatiently.

"Because they prove that the bond is broken between you; they prove the greatness of the wrong—the misery and the

sorrow. You are alone, cast out. I pray you to let me share that misery and that sorrow."

"No—for ever, no!" she replied, with intense decision.

"Do I ask for smiles? I come now when the shadow is deepest. I prize tears more than smiles. My love is not for sunshine. Mark what I will do. I will give all I possess, and give it gladly. I will throw up my commission. I will break with society; that society which has treated you with such heartless cruelty. I will bear you away from all this misery: happiness in a new land!"

"Shame!" she exclaimed, scornfully.

"Shame here, which cannot be averted. Can I—can any one—save you from this misery here in England? But abroad, unknown, we are free; a new land, a new life: that life which should have begun for us four years ago—that hope to which I have been ever true."

"No," she answered; "shame in my own

bosom, whether the world be ignorant or not."

"If I give up so much gladly, will you give up nothing?"

"Nothing, Captain Seton? Why, nothing is *all*!"

"I will live—*die* for you."

"Not die—only weary," she answered, with a derisive smile.

"Weary! Oh, Clara, is this just to me? Is my love a thing of yesterday? This is my first love, true from its birth up to now—true, because it has been tested; true, because it counts all that the world can give as nothing in the balance. Sacrifice, no sacrifice—sacrifice the truest joy!"

"Cease. I will listen no more!" she exclaimed, with resolute determination.

"Think well how the matter stands," he urged, vehemently. "My love on the one side, the world's cruel scorn on the other. Why, if your story cannot convince your friends, how shall it convince a jury? Besides, can I wait for a verdict? I must go to India at once, or not go."

"Then go—go, and leave me, for Heaven's sake! Every word you utter is a disgrace. Hush!" she exclaimed, listening, "some one comes. Go, I beg and pray. If you have any consideration left for me, go—go."

He withdrew into the garden. Martha entered with a lamp.

"Ah, Captain Seton," she murmured, "you *have* spoken for the last time! If none are true to me, I will still be true to myself. Has the brougham returned?" she inquired of Martha.

"No, ma'am."

"I am going to my room; please to send Jane up to me."

"I will attend to anything you want, ma'am."

"I want Jane!"

"Please, ma'am, Jane can't come."

"Why not? Is she busy?"

"I can't give any reasons, ma'am: she can't come." Martha scorned to palter with the truth.

"Is this your mistress's order?" asked

Clara, with a sickening feeling pervading her frame.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Do you mean to say that the girl is to be kept from me?”

“Those are my orders, ma’am. I am to wait upon you as long as you remain here, and not the other servants.”

“Oh, Martha, for Heaven’s sake!” she exclaimed, piteously, “this can’t be true. Am I so horribly wicked, that they are afraid of my saying a few parting words to a girl who has been kind and attentive to me?”

“I can only repeat, ma’am, that I am to wait upon you, and no one else. Jane has been brought up under missus’s own care; if she’d been her own daughter, missus couldn’t have been more particular about her. I’ll say that, if I never say another word.”

“Enough; I won’t detain you any longer.” But Martha choose to stay, for a purpose of her own.

“If you please, ma’am, I’m only a servant,

and you're a lady ; but I must make bold to say one word. There's one thing that makes us poor wicked things all equal—that's sin, ma'am—sin. You and I are both dreadful sinners. Oh, Mrs. Milburn, repent—repent !”

“ Silence, Martha ! ” exclaimed Clara, in a voice of anger, “ you forget yourself ; leave the room.”

But Martha did not immediately leave the room. She was stubborn by nature ; her theology was intense, though not comprehensive ; its cardinal principle was hatred. She had been persistently taught to hate sin, and she had included the sinner in the lesson. It was a grand opportunity for the vindication of her theology, and she resolved to be true to the opportunity.

“ I will do my duty, ma'am ; you shan't be lost for want of a saving word ; repent, while it is yet time—repent ! repent ! ”

Clara turned away with disgust and indignation.

“ A proud heart leadeth to destruction,”

Martha muttered in audible tones as she left the room.

And Martha spoke truly; the cruel work was done. Captain Seton little thought, as he skulked behind the bushes, that the woman who a few minutes before had rejected him with so much scorn and indignation, had fallen into his snare. He was resolved, indeed, once more to press his suit, although the effort seemed hopeless. Alas! the pride of Clara Milburn's heart had been evoked at last! A new and desperate spirit animated her soul, declaring its inward presence by an outward change, which well-nigh transformed her whole being; the softer outline faded from her face, and hard-cut lines of scorn took their place; the eyes lost their veiling of modest depression, and gazed with fixed, unabashed glance; the lips were close set, each muscle was strung to hardest tension.

"Oh, last drop of degradation!" she cried; "nothing spared—forced to my lips to the bitter dregs—no more hope, no more

faith! the battle's over! I'm beaten at last—let the defeat be on their heads.”

Seton stole in from the window entrance. She hurried up to him.

“Once more, Clara, I pray.”

“No need,” she cried, taking his hand, “I accept your offer, I go with you.”

He was startled by her words—startled by her strange aspect.

“Oh, happiness!” he murmured; but the word mocked him as he spoke it.

“Not happiness,” she answered, scornfully, as she snatched her hand away from him; “bitterness and shame!—take me for that, if you will.”

“I will.”

“Not love!—Hate! hate for the social injustice, for the scorn and contempt passed on me; no more meekness and resignation—a new heart, a heart of brass. Shame, then be it shame! Guilt, then be it guilt! I'm yours now—yours! yours!” she exclaimed, with fierce emphasis. “What! do you shrink at my words?”

And almost involuntarily he did shrink away from the woman he had won.

“Shrink?” he answered, with a forced smile.

“You do shrink. Oh, I can pardon you! I’m not the Clara Milburn you thought to win—gentle, soft, loving. I tell you another nature has sprung up in me—hardness, defiance, scorn for scorn—the river is crossed at last; respectability may frown and shrink on the other side. Do you care for me now?”

“If you are changed, I am not,” he answered, in feeble protest.

Was this the woman he had sought so earnestly to win? Was this the sweet soft triumph of love? He began to repent of his victory—sin had lost its rosy hue, and was fast becoming prosaic. Half-hearted, and dazed and bewildered by her manner, he endeavoured, with some forced show of ardour, to take her in his arms. She thrust him from her with a shudder of loathing and disgust. “No need of a kiss,” she

cried, "I am degraded enough without that seal of shame. Let us go!"

"My boat is at the bottom of the garden," he answered.

"No, Captain Seton," she replied, with withering scorn; "we two leave this house *openly*. Ring the bell."

"Ring the bell?" he exclaimed, with astonishment.

"Ring the bell," she answered, with resolute voice.

"But everybody——" he expostulated.

"Everybody *will* know," she replied, exulting in his hesitation and dismay. "I mean them to know; you said you would share my misery and sorrow, you must share my defiance and my scorn. Follow me, or leave me, as you will; there's yet time. Go back to society, and join the rest in spurning me."

"I follow you," he replied; and he felt that she was in very truth leading him.

"Don't lightly choose," she rejoined, in scornful tone: "and yet it doesn't much

matter: if you do fail me, I shall still have one true friend—death. One minute, though, before we go. Mrs. Bradley must know all about this affair. I'll write a few lines to her in requital for all the misery she made me suffer, whilst I clung to her for protection; those smiles of mine which covered anguish; that submission which bent to the lash of her tongue. Oh, my long-enduring hypocrisy, flung away at last—plain-speaking now!" She went to the writing-table.

He took her hand in his. "Your hand burns, Clara——"

"My brain as well—it's like a furnace." She wrenched her hand from him. "Quick! a pen—now, paper—thanks! My hand's firm enough, and my words shall be firm too. Read as I write—that's bitter!" she exclaimed. "Plain enough, isn't it? She'll understand that, won't she? Black and white—no equivocation. Ah, this will cut her Pharisaic righteousness to the quick! no doubt of shame and guilt now!" She held up the letter, thrusting it in his face,

that he might again read it, and see the desperate words she had written.

"Pray make haste," he said, nervously, pushing away her hand.

"No hurry; I must sign my name," she replied, with irritating calmness and deliberation.

"Then sign at once. Good heavens, that's Basil's voice!" he exclaimed.

"Is it?" she answered, with affected unconcern.

"I'm sure it is."

"What does that matter to us?"

"But he'll come here!"

"Let him come, by all means," she replied, with provoking calmness.

"We must leave before he comes."

"What! afraid of a *good* young man like Basil?" she answered, with taunting voice.

"This is folly, Clara; you really must consider a little what people will say."

"If I don't fear shame, why should you?" she asked, with strong emphasis.

"Besides," she added, in sarcastic tone,

"society will always forgive you when it is *convenient* for you to repent—it will never forgive me. An envelope, please."

He impatiently handed her an envelope.

"Now for the direction, and I shall be ready to go."

"Confound it, here he is!" exclaimed Seton, with evident dismay. "Quick! follow me. "He snatched up the letter, and hurried into the garden.

"I *will* direct this envelope before I stir from this chair," she said, with determination; and with careful, exact hand she wrote—"Mrs. Bradley, Broadmere Villa, Twickenham." She had scarcely risen from her chair when Basil entered the room.

This Basil—this good, virtuous, money-making young man—she felt a thrill of vindictive pleasure at meeting him once more.

"Oh, Mrs. Milburn," he exclaimed, "I was half afraid I should find you'd gone!"

"I am going directly."

"I'm so glad I've found you!"

"I don't think your mother would be

equally pleased," she replied in ironical tone.

"Nonsense," he answered, with a pleasant laugh.

"I beg you to tell her, that *you* have sought me, not that I have sought you; she considers you so good, so excellent, so irreproachable——"

"Bless me, Mrs. Milburn!" He, too, was struck with the strangeness of her face, and the unwonted hardness of her voice.

"I am so wicked—branded with shame—an outcast. Don't come near me; my influence on a young man would be so very pernicious. I should destroy that fair reputation which hedges you round. Why, even to speak to me is to risk your credit with society."

"Who says this?" he asked, indignantly.

"Your mother."

"I fear my mother has said some things I cannot defend," he answered in a tone of regret.

“Oh ! your mother was right enough. I *am* wicked—guilty—only worthy of your contempt. Look down upon me from your pedestal of respectability, and scorn me as you will.”

“Really, Mrs. Milburn——” he expostulated.

“Be hard !” she continued, in sarcastic voice. “You have never been tempted ; then show no mercy on one who has fallen—turn away and walk on the other side—I am a thing to shun.”

“Pray cease this random talk !” he exclaimed, earnestly. “I know the past must have been very hard to bear.”

“It *was* very hard,” she replied ; “no matter, *that* time is past and gone.”

“It is, thank Heaven !” His words were spoken with marked significance.

“What do you mean ?” she asked, struck by the tone of his voice.

“I repeat, that time *is* past and gone. I bring blessed news to you ; those calumnies and those lies are at an end ! Those vile

reptiles which swarmed against you are crushed ! ”

“Crushed ! ” she cried, in bewilderment.

“No more reproach,” he continued ; “no more false accusation ; no more fear of that wretched Court. You are saved from all that misery.”

“Saved ! How saved ? ”

“Your husband bears testimony to your perfect innocence.”

“Impossible ! ”

“With his own hand ! ”

“A miracle ! ” she exclaimed.

“Have faith,” he answered. “It was not possible that Heaven could permit this horrible injustice. I have been with your husband all day—it was a hard fight. I won’t speak of him to you ; enough, that I have shamed him into truth—plucked away the lies—broken up that vile conspiracy ; with his *own* hand he vouches for your perfect innocence ; here’s his letter, read it.” He gave her the letter, and she read it dazed and bewildered.

"All reproach is done away with by that letter," he continued. "You are restored with full right and all honour to your old position in society. No one can gainsay your husband's written words."

"It cannot be true," she answered; "it must be a dream."

"No dream, Mrs. Milburn—written words, written words!"

"What! innocent!" she cried. "No more reproach—no more coldness—no more scorn—no more bitter contempt! perhaps tenderness, perhaps affection, perhaps confidence and love once more."

And tears rose in her eyes, and the new hardness faded from her face, and the old softness returned, and she was her own true self once more; and through quick-falling tears she declared her gratitude.

"You have done all this. You, whom I despised—you, who seemed to be so cold; so distant—scarcely ever uttering a word to me. Oh! why did you let me feel all this hardness towards you? You, who have

been striving for my cause as no one else has striven ; you, who have saved me at the last."

"I'm not a fellow to talk much," he answered, bluntly. "If I can do a thing, I do it—and talk afterwards."

"Forgive me, Basil." She took his hand.

"Yes, yes ! fiddlesticks about forgiveness, and all that sort of thing ;" and he turned from her in his plain matter-of-fact manner.

"Innocent," she murmured. "Innocent in the sight of the world !" She heard, or thought she heard, a foot-fall in the garden. "Merciful Heaven ! he comes ;" and she gazed, as one fascinated, into the outer darkness.

"What's the matter ?" inquired Basil.

"Nothing—nothing."

"Do you hear any one in the garden ?"

"Nothing—nothing, I assure you. Oh ! not now, not now !" she murmured to herself. "Not dragged back to that perdition—to that shame ! not an outcast now !" In an access of terror she flew to Basil, as

if for protection. "I'm not guilty!" she cried, in agonised voice. "Not guilty! If I said I was guilty, it wasn't true—you'll believe that."

"I know it."

"But I did say I was guilty—I did say I was wicked; I did say I was branded with shame. If any one tells you that, it's false. Oh! you won't desert me, now, at this last moment, you won't desert me?"

"Why, you forget your husband's letter!" he answered, in assuring tone.

"Not that—not that. Oh, if any one says I'm guilty, you won't believe it?"

"Of course not," he replied indignantly. "I should like to see the man who'd dare to say it."

"You'll promise to uphold me still?"

"Oh, Mrs. Milburn, try to calm yourself. After all you've suffered, I don't wonder at this revulsion of feeling. Sit down for a minute." He led her to a chair. "You must try to regard the past as an ugly dream—a frightful nightmare—nothing more than

the product of a dream. All misery and sorrow are at an end. I only know of one thing for you to do," he added, after a pause.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Well, if I may dare to say so—forgive."

"Forgive?"

"Forgive my mother. If I have done you any service, I ask this as my reward."

"I do forgive her, from the bottom of my heart."

"Thank you;"—he grasped her hand;—"thank you, Mrs. Milburn."

"I can forgive others," she thought to herself; "can I ever forgive myself?"

"Why, you've never asked me whether I saw Mabel to-day?" he observed, in cheerful tone.

Her child! but his words fell dead upon her ears; for she was listening in agonized tension for the footfall of that man, who held possession of her accursed letter.

"Mabel? yes, Mabel," she answered, mechanically.

"I did see her; she's as bright as ever."

He was talking about her child ; but she was trying to solve a terrible doubt : “ Would that man have mercy on her ?—would he bury the past in silence ?—would he reveal her shame ? ”

“ You’ll see her very soon, Mrs. Milburn ; ” and Basil marvelled much at the strangeness of her manner.

“ Shall I ? shall I ? ” Her ear caught sound of a rustle in the shrubbery ; she started from her chair, and clung, terror-stricken, to Basil. “ If anything is said against me,” she gasped, “ you won’t believe it—promise me that—— ”

“ What, returning to that old story ! ” he said, in a good-natured, half-chiding tone. “ Nonsense, nonsense. I want you only to think about Mabel ; ” and he made her resume her seat. “ I’ve got another surprise for you, only you must promise to be very calm.”

“ Calm ! Indeed, I’m quite calm.”

“ I’ve done more than bring that letter—I’ve brought Mabel as well.”

“Brought Mabel!” she exclaimed, incredulously.

“She’s here, in this very house.”

Her child was in the house—the child she had been dying to see; but what was that to her? That man was waiting for her outside. Shame, disgrace, degradation; she had chosen *them* in that past moment of temptation.

“Asleep in Martha’s room,” he continued. “You see, I didn’t leave my work half done,” he added in a tone of pride. “Come, let’s go and see the little lady.”

He took Clara’s arm in his, and gently led her towards the door. She went with him a few paces, then she suddenly broke away from him. Her business was in *that* room, not at the bedside of her child.

“No, I can’t go—I can’t—not just now—it’s all so fearfully sudden. I’ll breathe the fresh air for a few minutes.” He offered her his arm to go into the garden. “No, leave me—leave me. I’d rather be alone;

leave me for a short time ; that's all I ask. I shall be myself directly."

He would have obeyed her, but at that moment his father and mother entered the room.

"Clara, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Bradley, "we know all about it; Martha's told us everything. We couldn't stop at the party. Mr. Bradley had a headache."

"Say we couldn't stop, Maria, because we felt somehow we hadn't done what was right."

Basil handed Tom Milburn's letter to his father, who read it with anxious attention.

Mrs. Bradley's repentance was full and heartfelt. She threw herself at Clara's feet, kneeling to her as she sat in the chair.

"Oh, Clara! can you forgive me?"

"She has forgiven you, mother," exclaimed Basil.

"Oh, my poor wronged darling!" continued Mrs. Bradley, with tears in her eyes. "How can you forgive me all the hard things I have said and thought? I feel so

ashamed. Oh, that I should ever have listened to those vile stories, and thought them true! Tell me, if you can, with your own lips that you forgive me."

"I do, Mrs. Bradley, I do forgive you."

Mrs. Bradley clasped Clara's hand in hers. "Only one thing I ask: prove your forgiveness by more than words. Remain with us—make this house your home."

"What! remain with you—remain here?" exclaimed Clara in tones of wonder.

"Our honoured guest," said Mr. Bradley, putting down Milburn's letter.

"Don't refuse us, Clara, I beg and pray," said Mrs. Bradley, with the greatest warmth.

"Enable me to repair the past."

"This is very kind—too kind," she answered; and then, with sudden change of tone, she started up, agitated and trembling. "No, no—I'm not worthy of this; I'm not indeed." And she involuntarily shrank away from Mrs. Bradley.

"Clara, dear, you say you have forgiven me; but these words sound like words of reproach."

"You can never return to your husband," observed Mr. Bradley gravely; "you must be *our* daughter."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Basil. "Then *our* sister, by Jove!"

"Yes; our daughter, our sister," said Mrs. Bradley, in kindest tone; "always with us—always revered as one who has passed through the fire of trial and temptation scathless."

Sadder than hard words of scorn and insult, fell the loving words of Mrs. Bradley on Clara's ear.

"No, no!" she murmured, sinking into a chair. "You do not know me. I am *not* worthy of your kindness."

And now most undoubtedly there was the sound of some one in the garden. Basil ran up to the window and looked out.

"Why, it's Seton, I believe. Hullo, Seton! What's the matter, old fellow?"

"Nothing," answered Seton from the outside; "only my skiff's got aground."

The terrible moment had arrived. Clara

started from her chair, and clung in terror to Mrs. Bradley.

“Oh, let me stay—let me stay! Don’t send me away! I’m not really guilty! I’m not, indeed I’m not! I swear I’m not!”

“We know it, my poor child,” said Mrs. Bradley, soothingly; and she tenderly pressed Clara to her heart. “We know it, darling—be assured of that. Poor burning forehead! Rest this throbbing head on my bosom. Be calm—be at peace. My daughter now.”

Seton entered from the garden.

“Why, confound it, Seton!” exclaimed Basil; “you’re always making a muddle with that stupid boat.”

Clara broke away from Mrs. Bradley’s arms: she met Seton face to face on the threshold.

“Oh, Captain Seton!” she exclaimed, in a broken, agitated voice, “everything is changed now—changed. My husband has declared my innocence—sent back Mabel. Everything is altered now. You under-

stand—*altered*. What's passed is passed. I'm to remain here—not go—not go! *Here*, in this house—with them—with them!"

She staggered back exhausted. Basil caught her in his arms; Mr. and Mrs. Bradley hurried up to her assistance; Captain Seton remained standing by himself on the threshold.

CHAPTER III.

A TERRIBLE PENANCE.

As a general rule, the instincts of life endure longer than the emotions; the feelings are fluctuating, but the minutiae of everyday existence stand firm like little rocks. Sorrow and joy, love and hate, transform our inward being; but the great landmarks of life, particularly of English family life—breakfast and dinner, and the customs which envelop them—are invariable. The man's soul is greatly altered for better or worse; but the automatic action of putting on a pair of boots at a given time, in a given locality, stands as a certificate of identity.

One year, its completion being the first of September, 1874, had altered everything

at Broadmere Villa except its customs. The woman, who had been suspected and spurned, ruled supreme over all its inmates ; she had won her sceptre through a violent revulsion of feeling in her favour, and she had retained her sceptre and consolidated her empire, through her gentleness, and sweetness, and loving self-denial, and that good sense which springs from a good heart.

Further than this, her conduct outside this household of love had added greatly to her reputation ; she had devotedly nursed the husband, who had so cruelly maligned her character, through a painful illness, ending in death, which mercifully closed a worthless life. People said that death was a good thing for Tom Milburn, indeed the very best thing that could possibly have happened to him ; and a good thing, to boot, that his wife should be free henceforth from such a husband.

But Clara Milburn did not desire to be free ; freedom was a terrible burden on her soul. She shed many bitter tears at her

husband's death; people marvelled much, but misunderstood wholly. Clara Milburn knew too well what her freedom meant; she knew, though Basil Bradley had never uttered one word, or given one faintest sign of feeling, that he loved and worshipped her; she knew that a heart of gold lay hidden under a phlegmatic, matter-of-fact, everyday business existence; she knew that in course of time he would assuredly make her an offer. Oh! that letter, which she had written in her mad despair! The letter was an enduring testimony of her shame, and it lay in the hands of Captain Seton. Yet she had not fallen; Basil had saved her, pure and spotless, on that terrible evening! What matter then, that letter, if Basil loved her so deeply? It mattered, because she was true and noble; it mattered, because she felt she was unworthy of Basil's chivalrous love and admiration; it mattered, because it was not in the power of her nature to deceive, in one iota, the man she loved.

The sense of a larger charity had fallen upon Mr. and Mrs. Bradley. They had indeed, be it said to their credit, never erred with respect to the smaller charities of life—subscription lists, to wit; nourishing soup, sago, and a stout fruity port. But they did bitterly repent, that through abject fear of the world, and not from inward conviction, they had deserted such a woman as Clara Milburn; and if not in sackcloth and ashes, at least in devoted love and tenderness, did they signify their entire repentance. As for Martha, staunch as she had been to her own school of theology, she gave up Little Bethel and took to the Church of England; and this wholly without solicitation, but simply out of blind love and admiration for Mrs. Milburn, whose very footsteps she worshipped. Indeed, she would probably have become a Mahomedan, a Jew, or even a Romanist—which would have been a far more difficult act of apostasy—had Mrs. Milburn belonged to either of those faiths.

But amidst all this change of opinion and

feeling, the breakfast-table stood as firm as a rock on this first day of September, 1874. The silver tea-kettle hissed and bubbled as, by stroke of the clock, Mr. Bradley poured the boiling water on the tea; the man-servant, by long enduring custom, extinguished the spirit-lamp and left the room, returning in due course, by the law of the same custom, with hot toast, kidneys, and the other addenda of an excellent breakfast-table; as between Mr. Bradley and the man-servant, the breakfast-table had become an absolute solemnity through prescriptive custom. If customs endure longer than feelings, the loss of customs is in most cases more painful than the loss of individuals: the man-servant loved and respected his master; but if Mr. Bradley had died, the recollection of that tea-kettle, with a toast-rack in sequence, would have been the *immortelle* consecrated to his memory in that man-servant's faithful heart.

As of yore, the gun-case had been placed on the small library-table; and, after making

tea, Mr. Bradley flew to that much-loved object. He took out the barrel and fidgeted with it in the most loving manner; polishing the outside tenderly with his silk pocket-handkerchief, viewing the inside telescopically, and revelling in the inward sheen of the bright spotless steel. On this first of September, Mr. Bradley was gleeful and not desponding; once more his boots were to crunch among the delightful turnips, once more he was to behold his much-loved birds. And yet, withal, his glee was clouded with a sense of wrong—a chill, as it were, in the ruby of '34. Mrs. Bradley frowned upon the expedition, although Basil had trained the cob to stand as firm as a four-post bed under fire; but undoubtedly the solicitude of women is one of the sorest afflictions of mankind.

“Where the deuce was Basil? By Jove, they ought to be starting!”

Martha entered with Basil's bag, and placed it by the side of the gun-case. She had done exactly the same thing for years.

“Where’s Mr. Basil, Martha? we shall be late.”

“Master Basil is talking to missus in her dressing-room,” rejoined Martha; and time, which had altered so many things, had failed to alter “Master” Basil into “Mister.”

The fear of being late caused Mr. Bradley to be irritable and fidgety; but Martha, entirely siding with her mistress, did not sympathise with her master’s love of sport; she was possessed, moreover, by an interest of her own—an interest of absorbing moment.

“If you please, sir,” she said, with tears in her eyes, “Mrs. Milburn has just made this for me;” and she held up a white worsted cloud for Mr. Bradley’s inspection.

“For you, Martha!” exclaimed Mr. Bradley, greatly bored.

“For the rheumatics, sir; she’s always doing something kind by me. I think she does it because I was so unkind to her; she’s the best and kindest woman that ever lived.”

"I never said she wasn't, Martha," replied Mr. Bradley, peevishly.

"Please, sir, I never can help speaking my mind when anybody mentions her name."

"I didn't mention her name, Martha. I never do mention her name on principle," rejoined Mr. Bradley.

But the flood-gates of Martha's admiration were not to be closed.

"She forgave me all my wicked words, sweet dear; and she's taught me to be merciful and humble-minded, instead of being froward and stiff-necked. I don't mean the rheumatics, sir. She's an angel, if ever a woman was an angel."

"Experience answers the query in the negative," replied Mr. Bradley, with an inward chuckle, "so the assertion falls. Go and find Mr. Basil directly."

Martha obeyed, leaving the room with tears in her eyes. This exhibition of Martha's feelings, portended the advent of some great event, whereof Mr. Bradley was in utter ignorance.

“Dear, dear!” he exclaimed with some irritation, “what a comfortable place this world might be, if it wasn’t for the good people in it! Goodness is so infernally aggressive. Just leave evil alone, and it won’t scratch; but goodness is for ever showing its claws. Clara’s Milburn’s goodness has become a perfect nuisance. My wife, Martha, all the maids, worship her. Hang me if the admiration of women isn’t more virulent than their antipathies! Why don’t Basil come? Egad! if keenness for sport goes for anything, I’m a younger man than my own son.”

At last Basil and Mrs. Bradley entered the breakfast-room; but, lack-a-day, this was not the joy of a sportsman on the first of September. Basil seemed strangely nervous and distracted.

“Come, my boy,” exclaimed Mr. Bradley, with impatience, “get ahead with your breakfast; here, this pie’s the stuff for straight shooting,—ballast for the mind.”

Mr. Bradley helped his son liberally;

but, plague upon it, it was too hard that Mrs. Bradley should throw cold water upon his happiness by her unsympathetic manner.

“Hang it, Maria; it’s no use your looking so glum. I *mean* to go. The cob was sent over last night; and I won’t be stopped, that’s flat!”

“You won’t be stopped by me,” replied Mrs. Bradley, “I know that well enough. When men are bent on doing foolish things, it’s no use for women to speak.”

“But they *do* speak all the same,” retorted Mr. Bradley. “Hang it, Basil!” he exclaimed with dismay; “don’t sit up eating dry toast! you won’t make your double shots on that sort of diet.”

“All right, father,” replied Basil, making an attempt on the pie.

“It’s not all right,” exclaimed Mr. Bradley, ruefully.

“How you do keep on bothering,” interposed Mrs. Bradley. “Let Basil eat what he likes, can’t you?”

“Bless me!” retorted Mr. Bradley;

“you’re always wanting to stuff the things down the boy’s throat. Perhaps it’s that infernal money market that worries him. I’ll read the money article to you, Basil, while you eat; a quiet mind’s the best trencherman;” and Mr. Bradley took up the *Times*.

“Dear me!” exclaimed Mrs. Bradley; “Basil don’t want to be bothered about money articles.”

“If he don’t make a good breakfast his shooting’s done for,” expostulated Mr. Bradley. “I know what sport is; nothing like it for making a man’s heart beat, and sending his pulse to the deuce.”

“Nothing, father?” rejoined Basil, with a significant smile at Mrs. Bradley.

“No, my boy,” replied Mr. Bradley, seriously. “I’ve lived to my time of life—and I’m not a young man, remember—and I repeat, there’s nothing like sport.”

“Well, really,” observed Mrs. Bradley, “I believe men are sometimes in love.”

“That’s true, as far as it goes,” rejoined

Mr. Bradley : “ but from what I *feel* at this moment about sport, and what I *remember* about love, I maintain that sport is the worst thing in the world to set a man's heart beating; but mind you, Basil, whether it's sport or love, there's one maxim, eat a good breakfast, or you'll miss bird or woman—it don't matter which—by Jove, you will ! ”

“ I'll do my best with the breakfast,” answered Basil, with every desire to humour his father.

“ Good boy ! at it like a true sportsman—a slice of that ham ! ” and Mr. Bradley seized the carving-knife with zealous purpose.

Alas, for Basil's breakfast ! Martha passed the window, and unperceived by Mr. Bradley, gave a significant nod to her mistress.

“ Here's Martha, Basil,” whispered Mrs. Bradley to her son.

Basil started up, and hurried into the garden.

“What the deuce is the matter now?” exclaimed Mr. Bradley, utterly perplexed.

“Dear me, can’t you understand?” answered Mrs. Bradley, with a provoking smile of superiority.

“No, I can’t,” retorted Mr. Bradley doggedly.

“It’s as plain as a pikestaff,” rejoined Mrs. Bradley.

“But I don’t see the pikestaff.”

“Once for all, then—Basil’s in love!”

“Is he?” exclaimed Mr. Bradley, with intense surprise.

“Is he?” echoed Mrs. Bradley, in that peculiar tone of long-suffering contempt with which women, and especially wives, address the stupidity of men and husbands.

“Once for all, he is!”

“Not Clara Milburn, surely?” inquired Mr. Bradley, groping about in the darkness of his mind.

“Desperately,” rejoined Mrs. Bradley. “Why, dear me, what have you been doing with your eyes all this time?”

"Eyes!" retorted Mr. Bradley, greatly nettled by his wife's manner. "Why, for anything I could see, she's been as cold and indifferent towards him as he's been cold and indifferent towards her."

"Bless the man!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradley, almost bursting with the force of ineffable contempt. "That's love!"

"Then it shows how much I must have forgotten," replied Mr. Bradley, with a dawning sense of humility.

"Do you suppose," continued Mrs. Bradley, with increased tone of superiority, "that Clara Milburn is the sort of woman to court a man? Besides, her hand has only been free these eight months. Decency, Mr. Bradley, if you please."

"But Basil," interposed Mr. Bradley, "why the deuce should he show so much indifference?"

"Diffidence, not indifference," replied Mrs. Bradley, with condescending pity. "Is Basil the sort of young man to press his suit at such a period?"

"Then why does he?" inquired Mr. Bradley, with increased perplexity.

"Bless me, Mr. Bradley, you'll forget your alphabet next!" Mrs. Bradley absolutely revelled in her sense of superiority. "I declare I must explain everything. Hasn't Mark Seton returned most unexpectedly from India? Hasn't Mark Seton been heard to boast that he's as good as engaged to Clara?"

"Has he?" exclaimed Mr. Bradley, with indignation. "Impertinent dog! that fellow marry our Clara? No; hang him! Why, old Seton is deucedly angry about his coming home. There's a screw loose in money matters. Old Seton has been consulting Basil; something queer, I'm afraid, though Basil's lips are closed."

"One thing is quite evident," observed Mrs. Bradley; "Seton came home as soon as he heard that Clara had been left that fortune. You know he's seen her frequently, and he's written to her as well. Martha hears that he has positively made a

special appointment to see her this morning. I've told Basil, if he loves Clara, that he ought to speak out at once: it's a duty he owes to himself and to her. Poor boy, he's so dreadfully nervous! and just to think I couldn't stop you from worrying him at breakfast. Martha was to tell us as soon as Clara returned from her morning walk with Mabel. You'll like Clara to be Basil's wife?" added Mrs. Bradley after a pause.

"That I should," exclaimed Mr. Bradley, with enthusiasm; "the very wife for Basil. But will she accept him?"

"Not a doubt, if I can read a woman's heart."

"And you won't mind losing your son?"

"Not to such a woman as Clara. Besides, they won't live far off," replied Mrs. Bradley, with tears in her eyes. "Do you know, I was thinking of that house of the Wilsons, at Teddington. Such a lovely garden! such a beautiful drawing-room! such a sweet boudoir for Clara!"

Mrs. Bradley was delighted with the

bright vision of wedded happiness which quickly rose before her eyes. As for Mr. Bradley, Nature had not intended him to soar amid the empyrean of love. She had denied him those pinions of the soul and other needful appliances, but in matters concrete she had endowed him liberally; in matters of house property and house value, she had rendered him pre-eminently great, indeed, oracular, which was a clear proof of his greatness.

He hummed and hawed with cautious deliberation. "Good, substantial-looking house, no doubt, but how about the drainage?"

Mrs. Bradley was silent.

"How about the drainage?" he repeated, solemnly.

Mrs. Bradley was vanquished.

"She'll make him a good wife, I know she will;" and Mrs. Bradley burst into tears.

But Mr. Bradley had regained his supremacy. "Before everything else," he

added, with increased solemnity, "we must think about the drainage."

Alas, as well for the empyrean, as the concrete! the fabrics respectively of Mr. and Mrs. Bradley's creation, were destined to be rudely destroyed. Clara Milburn had refused Basil's offer.

Basil entered the room with a feverish flush deep set in his cheeks.

"Come on, father, let's go;" and with trembling hands he took up the gun.

"But, Basil——" inquired Mr. and Mrs. Bradley, with almost breathless anxiety.

"Refused!" answered Basil.

"Refused!" echoed Mr. and Mrs. Bradley, in blank amazement.

"There's an end of it!" exclaimed Basil, in agitated voice; and he replaced the barrel in the case.

"But, Basil——" expostulated Mrs. Bradley.

"I can't talk about it, mother. Come, let's be off; it's very late."

"You won't go now, my boy, will you?"

inquired Mr. Bradley, with some astonishment.

“Not go? of course I shall! it’s no use making a fuss about these things.”

“Let me speak to her, Basil,” said Mrs. Bradley, with tears in her eyes.

“No, no, mother——”

“Let your mother speak to her, Basil,” reiterated Mr. Bradley. “You wouldn’t eat your breakfast. I said you’d miss your bird,” he added, mournfully.

“It’s no use, mother,” replied Basil, decisively. “Do you think I’d have lost her for want of words.” He wished to be a stoic; he wished to endure his agony in silence; he wished to hide it from every living soul; but his feelings forced him to speak. He pushed the gun-case from him and threw himself into a chair. “It’s what I’ve always felt,” he murmured; “she’s too good for me, a thousand times too good. I’ve seen a change in her conduct ever since that fortune was left her. Money wouldn’t alter her character. There’s some-

thing—I can't make it out. I shouldn't mind if she were going to marry some man really worthy of her; but hang it, if she throws herself away on that fellow Seton, it's deuced hard to bear. I mustn't make an ass of myself," he added, striving to crush down his feelings.

"Does she refer to Seton?" inquired Mrs. Bradley.

"No, no; it's what he's said to me," replied Basil; "that he has a claim upon her hand."

"It can't be the old engagement," observed Mrs. Bradley.

"I can't tell," answered Basil, in painful perplexity; and then he started up in the utmost agitation. "By Heaven, she must not marry Captain Seton! I was never placed in such a painful position in my whole life; my lips are tied and bound. Don't let her marry Seton, mother!" he exclaimed with vehemence. "If you have any influence over her, try to stop that; beg and pray of her; promise me."

“Trust me to do my best, Basil,” replied Mrs. Bradley, with deep solicitude.

“Don’t say one word about me,” he added, clasping his mother’s hand; “that affair’s settled and done, once for all. She’s refused me, and that’s the end of it. I shall be all right by the end of the day; a good tramp through the turnips’ll put any man to rights. I’ll bet I don’t miss a bird after luncheon! Sport’s the thing, father, after all. Come along, we shall be awfully late;” and, seizing the gun-case, he hurried off into the garden.

“This is a bad business!” exclaimed Mr. Bradley, in desponding tone. “What’s to be done?”

“Go, by all means; anything to get Basil out of the way. I’ll promise to set the matter to-rights, if I’m only left alone,” replied Mrs. Bradley with confidence.

“I never felt so unhappy in all my life,” continued Mr. Bradley, wiping his eyes. “Hang the birds! it’s no use trying to shoot with a heavy heart. I shall stop at

home. I ought never to have wished to go," he added, with self-reproach.

"Bless the man!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradley, greatly irritated by her husband's suggestion. "Don't make a noodle of yourself, pray."

"I can't help feeling for that poor boy;" and Mr. Bradley wiped his glasses with fervour.

"You're alive and well at your age," retorted Mrs. Bradley, "and I believe I refused *your* hand once upon a time."

"Did you?" he exclaimed, with mild surprise; and then, after some reflection, he added, "Dear me! I recollect there was something of the sort. I suppose, though, one feels more for one's children, for I never remember feeling about myself as I feel now about Basil."

"You declared you should die, and a pack of stuff!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradley, in a somewhat injured tone.

"Bless me! is it possible?" he answered, in a perfectly unconcerned manner. "Well, my dear, if you wish me to go, of course."

“I wish to be left alone with Clara all day. When you return, it will be all right; that I promise.”

“Take care you keep your promise, Maria. I never felt so dismal in all my life.” And with a heavy heart Mr. Bradley followed his son.

Mrs. Bradley quietly revolved the situation in her mind. “Basil has made some stupid muddle, I’ll be bound. Men ought never to make offers; they are too clumsy for such delicate work. Ten to one they manage to frighten a woman out of her wits, She don’t know whether she’s saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’; and when ‘no’ ’s slipped out through inadvertence, she sticks to it out of a stupid feeling of self-respect, though she’s dying to say ‘yes’ all the time.” Mrs. Bradley entertained no misgivings as to ultimate victory.

The interest which Martha took in Basil’s offer was not one iota less than the interest of Mr. and Mrs. Bradley. She could not endure the strain upon her curiosity: on

the departure of Mr. Bradley, she entered the breakfast-room suddenly and without due pretext, and immediately burst into a flood of tears.

“What’s the matter, Martha?” exclaimed Mrs. Bradley, greatly astonished.

“I do love Master Basil so,” sobbed Martha; “it’s very presuming, I know it is, but, please, ma’am, is it all right?”

“All in good time, Martha,” replied Mrs. Bradley, in a tone of reproof.

“I was afraid there was something wrong by Master Basil’s manner when he started.”

“All in good time, I repeat, Martha.”

“She never could be so cruel as to refuse Master Basil,” murmured Martha; and with fresh tears and scant comfort, she retired to meditate upon the mystery of love.

As on the previous first of September, so on this present first of September, Clara Milburn entered that breakfast-room with sad feelings; but their source was entirely changed. The two women who had wanted

to expel her with ignominy were ready to fall on their knees to beg her to remain—to become the wife of the young man they had striven to shield from her pernicious influence.

“Mrs. Bradley, I want to speak to you. I suppose Basil has told you——” and Clara burst into tears. “It is necessary for me to leave this house.”

“I hope not, my love,” replied Mrs. Bradley, cheerfully.

“Of course, I cannot remain here now,” urged Clara.

“We’ll decide that presently, my dear.”

“After having refused your son!”

“I refused Mr. Bradley—twice, I think—but I am Mrs. Bradley, nevertheless.”

“I can never be Basil’s wife—never,” answered Clara, with all the firmness she could command.

“Take my word for it,” replied Mrs. Bradley, smiling, and with thorough confidence in easy victory. “A woman’s ‘never’ is not nearly so strong as a man’s

love. Basil's love for you is very strong. I am his mother. I know it."

"He must marry some young girl!" exclaimed Clara, fervently; "a bright, fresh spirit untouched by sorrow; a heart which loves for the first time in its love for him; not a heart like mine, worn with anguish and misery. I am too old to marry Basil!"

"Nonsense, my love," answered Mrs. Bradley, with a pleasant laugh; "you're just the same age."

"In years, maybe; not in feelings."

"Believe me," continued Mrs. Bradley, seriously, "Basil's feeling towards you is no light fancy—the influence of a pretty face and fascinating manners; you are the idol of his devotion—the embodiment of that high standard he has formed of woman."

"If he only knew me as I am," she answered, with a shudder.

"Trust all that to Basil."

"And let him discover the truth when I am his wife? No, Mrs. Bradley."

“Doubt yourself, if you will,” rejoined Mrs. Bradley, with emphasis, “but trust in him—trust in us. Pardon me for a moment, if I revert to the past. You came to this house a fugitive from lies and calumny—no woman could ever have been thrust into lower depths of contempt—and now there is no measure to the esteem and love we bear towards you. I once spoke very cruel words; I have striven to atone for them, have I not?”

“You have, dear Mrs. Bradley, you have;” and Clara pressed Mrs. Bradley’s hand to her lips.

“And now I ask you to be his wife,” continued Mrs. Bradley, in agitated voice. “I, his mother, ask you. Think what I ask!” she exclaimed fervently, and with tears in her eyes. “Oh, Clara, this world is very wicked! this life of ours is hedged round with all sorts of evil. I ask you to take the burden from my hands; to be the guardian angel of his life; to guide him as only a true, good woman can guide, and

save a young man amid all these sore temptations. I confide his happiness and his welfare into your keeping. Can a woman give a greater token of her confidence and esteem ? ”

Surely this appeal must win the victory. But, to Mrs. Bradley's amazement and dismay, there was no response.

“ Speak to me, Clara dear, speak to me ! ”

“ I dare not accept this trust,” answered Clara, with averted face.

“ You are worthy of it, as he is worthy of you ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Bradley.

“ No, no,” she murmured, with painful utterance. “ I dare not.”

Mrs. Bradley's confidence and self-possession had well-nigh deserted her ; one last chance remained, and she eagerly snatched at it.

“ Clara, dear, is gratitude nothing ? Think how his faith in you never faltered ; how in his eyes, all through that wretched time, your character stood as high then as it does now ; think how he forced that letter

from your husband—how he brought Mabel back to you ! ”

“ How he saved me that night ! ” she murmured to herself, with a pang of despair.

“ In face of all this, can you tell me you don’t love him ? ”

“ Oh, Mrs. Bradley, don’t press me in this terrible way ! I am bound to another. ’

“ Bound ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Bradley, with affected astonishment. “ Impossible ! ”

“ Irrevocably,” murmured Clara. “ Captain Seton ! ”

“ Is Captain Seton to be compared with Basil ? ” asked Mrs. Bradley, in a tone of contempt.

“ I am bound to Captain Seton. ”

“ You must not marry this man, Clara ; he is not worthy of you ; his conduct has not been what it ought to be in money matters. Break with him at once—it is your duty to yourself—your child. ”

“ I cannot ! ”

“ Think well what you are doing,” said Mrs. Bradley, by way of one last passionate

appeal. "You'll leave us! We, who love you so deeply! Basil, whose heart and soul are bound up in you! Have mercy on him—it will cast a blight over his future life! Oh, Clara, it ought to be a great happiness for a woman to be loved and revered as he loves you! Say the word, my darling, that one word which will make us all so happy—our daughter—his wife!"

"If I dared—if I dared!" exclaimed Clara, starting up. "For mercy's sake, Mrs. Bradley, don't press me any more; I can never be Basil's wife." And Mrs. Bradley felt that she was utterly vanquished.

Nevertheless, the battle was not over; the lover had returned to renew the combat. Basil had indeed started with his father; but after driving about a mile, he had turned the horse's head for home. He stood awhile at the window, watching his mother and Clara, but unperceived by them. Presently Martha entered the room, with a gloomy face and tearful eyes.

"Please, ma'am, Captain Seton's com-

pliments, and he would be glad to see Mrs. Milburn."

"Let *me* see him, Clara!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradley. "Commission me to speak for you."

Would she had been free to do this! but, alas! there was no escape, no refuge. Basil's faith, which had saved her on that fatal evening, was powerless to save her now. "No, no, Mrs. Bradley," she answered, "I must see Captain Seton."

"Please, ma'am," exclaimed Martha, addressing Mrs. Milburn in a voice half inaudible with emotion, "let Missus see him, do!"

Basil had overheard Martha's announcement, and he entered the room. He did not heed their surprise, and he spoke in the hard, articulate tone of intense effort.

"Let Captain Seton wait. Mrs. Milburn will see him presently. Go, Martha," and Martha left the room. "I've come back," he continued. "I'd left something unsaid—I must say it now. Leave us, mother.

I'll ring—I shan't be long—and then Captain Seton can come." Half awed by her son's manner, Mrs. Bradley left the lovers together.

As soon as they were alone, Basil addressed Clara in the same painful tone. Notwithstanding all his efforts at self-control, she could see how his whole frame trembled with emotion; but it was her punishment to be forced to torture the man she loved.

"You've said 'no' to my prayer, Clara; but I didn't tell you everything. There was one thing I never meant you to know—had you said 'yes' to me, you never would have known it—but my love for you is so deep, that I dare not omit anything which may turn the scale in my favour. Oh, Clara!" he exclaimed passionately, "you *must* be mine. Weigh us fairly in the scale, and then say if he has acted a better part towards you than I have—that he is more worthy of the reward than I am."

"My gratitude for all you have done for

me can never be too great." But it racked her soul that when he asked for love she could only give him gratitude.

"Not gratitude," he answered, vehemently, "love—my love, which springs from admiration and esteem—my love, which is worship, if ever saint were worshipped. Oh, Clara! I believed in you then, as the world believes in you now. I asked for no proof, I held only by my faith. That first of September, last year, I brought you the letter which saved you from being sent away from this house."

"You did," she answered, in a low, trembling voice.

"And I brought back Mabel. I told you I had had a long argument with Tom Milburn."

"You did!—that you had at last convinced him of my innocence."

"I did say that," he answered, "but it wasn't the truth!"

"Not the truth!" she exclaimed, with surprise, "why, it was his letter!"

"Yes, his *own* hand," he rejoined in a tone of sarcasm—"written words!' I did try to shame the truth out of him, that's true enough; but he only laughed at me, drove me half mad with his cursed insinuations, stung me to the quick with fresh lies against you. I left him, but he hadn't shaken my belief."

"Stil he wrote that letter," she urged.

"I went to *that* woman," he replied, in deliberate voice, "and I bribed *her* with money to make him write it—bribed *him* with money to let me bring Mabel back to you. I had made money that morning in a lucky speculation—no matter the sum—they had it."

"What!" she cried, in utter bewilderment, "*you* believed in me, though he still persisted in that shameful accusation?"

"Innocent or guilty from his lying lips would have made no difference."

"Then your faith was all that saved me on that said evening?"

"It was," he answered proudly.

“And that faith,” she continued, “was not converted into assurance until his solemn death-bed declaration?”

“It was not! Oh, Clara! have I not deserved your love?”

“You have!” she answered passionately—the words flew to her lips—“would it were mine to bestow.”

“It is—one word.”

“I dare not utter that word.”

“Have mercy,” he cried; “don’t trifle with me, I can scarcely bear myself;” the tears were full in his eyes, and he knelt to her as she sat with face averted from him and hands hard clasped; and with broken sentences he urged his prayer.

“Oh, Clara! if you are my wife, a vista opens of brightest happiness, every joy of existence bears a tenfold charm; if you are not my wife, everything fades away, dark, unprofitable; life without a joy—be that sunshine of my life,”

She made no answer to his words.

“Oh, Clara!” he cried, in utter des-

peration, "can you say you do not love me?"

Could she say she did not love him? this man who had pawned a lie on his faith in her honour—this man who had worshipped her with all the chivalry of ancient knight-hood.

"*I do love you, Basil.*" As she spoke the words she rose from her chair, and started from him as she had started from Seton on that fatal evening.

No need to start: those words she had spoken were in themselves enough for Basil, nay, too much for him to endure, too much for his heart wrought to such a pitch of painful tension. "Thank God!" he muttered; and though he was a true man, brave and manly with the best, he burst into tears.

How proud she could have felt of this power she held over the man she loved!—but pride was only anguish now—she flew to his side.

"No, no, Basil!" she exclaimed, in a

voice of anxious expostulation; "I do love you, that's all I am able to say; wait till you have heard everything. I can *never* be your wife."

"What do you mean? don't torture me," he answered in a piteous voice.

"It's my fault," she rejoined, in broken sentences; "I've prayed that you might not love me. I have striven to be cold towards you, and all the while my heart was burning with love. I ought to have left this house, but I was too weak for that; my love kept me spell-bound here."

"For God's sake, what does all this mean?" he exclaimed in well-nigh savage tones; he could endure the terrible strain no longer.

"It means that the saint you have worshipped is a weak, miserable woman."

"This is folly," he answered.

She went to the bell and rang it.

"Captain Seton will come!" he exclaimed in amazement at her act.

"He must come," she rejoined; "he is concerned in this affair."

"Come what may," he cried, in increased astonishment and anger, "swear you will never marry that man."

"I will never marry him," she answered. "I *do* swear that!"

Basil was about to withdraw. "You must stay, Basil; it will soon be over—very bitter, but short."

So they waited for Captain Seton; and Basil saw her change from the woman he loved, into the woman of that September evening—rigid figure, countenance of painful tension, and eyes of hard, scornful gaze.

Seton entered the room.

"I have sent for you!" she exclaimed, on the moment of his entrance, in tone of contempt and abhorrence.

"We are not alone," he observed turning to Basil.

"Designedly," she answered. "Mr. Basil Bradley has made me an offer—he has full right to hear all that I say to you. You assert that you have a claim on my hand?"

“I do, Clara ; a prior claim to all else—the strongest claim a man can have. ’

“But if Mrs. Milburn chooses,” interposed Basil.

“She has no liberty of choice,” rejoined Seton calmly ; “she has bound herself to me by an act she cannot cancel.”

“Monstrous !” cried Basil, nettled by Seton’s manner.

“I did not come here to bandy words with Mr. Basil Bradley,” answered Seton, in a firm tone.

“No !” exclaimed Clara, interposing with rapid utterance between the two men, “you came here to enforce a threat on me ; you came here to boast that you had it in your power to drag me down to your own level ; to declare that I was worthy of you. You have that power—exercise it now.”

“What do you mean ?” asked Seton.

“Read that letter !” she replied.

“That letter !” he exclaimed with surprise.

“That accursed letter,” she answered, deliberately.

"Which I have never revealed to a single living soul."

"Which you have kept carefully to torture me," she rejoined, bitterly. "You have threatened me with its publicity if I ever marry any one but you. Well, Mr. Basil Bradley has made me an offer—read it to him, and let him hear why I cannot be his wife."

"Have mercy on yourself!" exclaimed Seton.

"I have," she rejoined; "truest mercy—I destroy your power over me—read it."

"No," he answered.

"Afraid!" she cried, contemptuously, "you would not have been afraid to send a copy of that letter to Mr. Basil Bradley. What! twice a coward?—ready enough to sin in secret—ready enough to malign in secret—not brave enough to do it openly!"

"Mrs. Milburn!" exclaimed Seton, in a tone of menace. Basil started forward; Clara waived him aside.

"Read, I say."

"I refuse," answered Seton, with sullen resolution.

"Then I must read it myself."

"I possess the letter," rejoined Seton.

"I possess the *copy* you sent to me." She drew the letter from her pocket. "This letter is dated the first of September, 1873, nine o'clock at night," and with low, but intensely clear articulation, she read the contents: "Mrs. Bradley, you have branded me with guilt; before you receive this letter, the accusation will be true. You, and all your household have condemned me; before you receive this letter, the condemnation will be justified. I leave this house with Captain Seton. I am going to be his mistress. No doubt of guilt now! Yours faithfully, CLARA MILBURN."

While she read the letter Basil shrank away, and almost blinded with emotion staggered to a chair.

The truth was revealed—all was lost, and the old feeling of desperate defiance once more took possession of her soul.

“So, Captain Seton,” she added, tauntingly, “you are harmless now. The one being, who in my eyes, outweighs the whole world—the one being who believed in me when the whole world turned aside—the man I revere and love, is lost to me for ever. All that makes life worth living—all joy, all happiness—all is destroyed—wrecked. Go and blazon that letter about as you will—fling the story broadcast—it can do me no more harm.”

“Enough of this rhodomontade,” exclaimed Seton; “don’t blame me for this mad conduct: you might have kept the disgrace a secret, and married Mr. Basil Bradley, if you had chosen.”

“I might have *bought* the letter from you for so much money,” she answered, with intense scorn; “I might have married him, and left it for you to boast that the delay in directing an envelope had saved the wife of Basil Bradley from being the mistress of Captain Seton. No! better he should learn the truth in time, and be saved

from such disgrace. I won't detain you any longer," she added, contemptuously, "you can go! Remember, the worst is done. I repeat, make what use you like of that letter—it can do me no more harm. Good morning, Captain Seton!" and she bowed to him with a courtesy which marked her contempt and scorn.

Seton turned to go with an embarrassed air—crestfallen, like a beaten cur.

"One word, Captain Seton!" exclaimed Basil, starting from his chair.

"What do you want, sir?" asked Seton, turning savagely on Basil.

"Basil!" exclaimed Clara, in a tone of deprecation.

There was no cause for apprehending any fracas. Basil was now thoroughly master of himself; he was endowed with that order of mind which, face to face with a great catastrophe, is perfectly calm.

"It is only a matter of business, Mrs. Milburn," he replied, quietly. He threw an emphasis on the words "Mrs. Milburn."

She understood only too well the meaning of that emphasis, and shrank away from him. "Your uncle, Captain Seton, has confided to me the the arrangement of certain business matters on your behalf—certain bills——"

"Curse it!" muttered Seton, between his teeth.

"We will, if you please, discuss the matter outside," continued Basil. "I will follow you, Captain Seton:" and Seton and Basil entered the garden.

Well, it was all over — the terrible moments had come and gone. She had been true to herself; she had not in one jot deceived the man she loved; she had told him every syllable of the sad truth. But Basil!—all her thoughts flew to Basil. When she remembered how he had loved and honoured her, beyond all measure of common love and honour, she felt how terrible the blow would be to him.

"Basil, poor Basil!" she cried, and the tears she had been unable to shed before,

filled her eyes ; “ how you’ll suffer—and my love which could have soothed every sorrow of your life ; my love, which could have lulled every pain ; my love must be thrust out, and you must bear this sorrow alone. I have erred, I must bear the torment ; but he has not erred, why must he suffer ? Oh, hell of innocence to be linked in love and sympathy with guilt ! Let him find some noble woman, who may build up the faith I have destroyed—who may raise again the noble standard trampled beneath my feet.” And with her thoughts still centred upon Basil, Basil returned from the interview with Seton.

He addressed her in well-nigh his ordinary matter-of-fact business manner. “ I have brought you *that* letter, Mrs. Milburn.” She started up at his voice, and he placed the fatal letter in her hand.

“ Thank you, Mr. Bradley ! ” she answered, with averted head. “ The venom has been expended.”

“ I thought perhaps for Mabel’s sake,” he rejoined, significantly.

"I had forgotten her—the second time in my life—fatal, both!"

"Have no fear of Captain Seton," he continued; "I have effectually sealed his lips. Fortunately, I had the power."

"Thank you!" she murmured in a low voice. "I dare not trust myself to speak."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Milburn," he said, briefly; and he turned from her. She lingered near him. "Don't let me detain you; good-bye."

"Good-bye," she muttered faintly, and she retired towards the door. He thought she had gone, and he threw himself heavily on the sofa, and buried his face in his hands.

She felt it was all over—she knew she must go; she meant to leave the room—to leave the house forthwith—but the volition of the heart was stronger than the purpose of the head. She flew back to the sofa; she threw herself on her knees, and clasped his hand with the desperation of drowning agony.

"Have mercy, Basil! I was mad when

I wrote that letter—mad, writhing under a sense of horrible injustice, cruelty, scorn. Mad—for degradation seemed the only sorry spite I could fling in the face of the world; mad, for all faith had gone in Heaven's justice or man's mercy. I was thirsting for some sympathy, some support, some kindness—no matter where—but I never loved him! When I said I would fly with him, it was hate and defiance, and a desperate feeling that death would come quickly and end it all. Oh, Basil! you could worship me when I stood, as you thought, a saintly being, superior to all trial, all temptation! pity me, now that I have proved myself a weak woman—conquered, not conqueror—but not guilty—not guilty! No, thank Heaven! saved by you! Not guilty, not fallen—because I can cling to you, and pray for mercy, and clasp your hands with mine. Oh, it would be as noble to look down with love as to look up with admiration! I *do* love you, Basil; I have veiled my feelings with silent

unconcern and studied coldness; all the while treasuring every little word you uttered—every glance—every look. I said to myself, I must love him in my own heart, though I can never be his wife. Oh, Basil! is there no hope, no joy for me? must this joy, which has begun to dawn at the end of dreary years of misery, be hidden by darker clouds? I knew this day must come. I thought I could mask my sorrow with calmness, and steal away in silence; but I never measured the agony which racks me now. Forgive me, if you can. Love me, Basil! dear Basil! If you cannot love me, I must die!”

His hands bore the red marks of the convulsive clasp of her fingers.

Mrs. Bradley entered the room, followed by Mr. Bradley.

“Clara!—Basil!” exclaimed Mrs. Bradley.

She started to her feet at the voice of Mrs. Bradley, and Basil also rose from the sofa.

“Don’t tell them, Basil,” she whispered beseechingly in his ear; “it will kill me.”

“We saw Captain Seton go,” said Mrs. Bradley. “Oh, tell us it’s all right now!”

“Have mercy on me, Basil,” she whispered, in agonized accents; “don’t speak till I have left this house. I cannot endure the shame before them.”

“Well, Basil, is it all right between you two?” urged Mrs. Bradley, in anxious voice.

“Yes, mother, it is all right,” answered Basil; and he took Clara’s hand in his: “Your daughter!”

“Basil!” she cried, in her amazement.

“My wife!” he added; and he drew her towards him.

“What love, and trust, and faith!” she murmured.

“My wife!” he repeated, with emphasis.

She burst into tears, and would have fallen to the ground, but he held her in his arms.

People said that Mrs. Basil Bradley worshipped her husband; nor were they wrong in their affirmation: people also said that Basil Bradley worshipped his wife, and she was worthy of his worship; and most joyful of all thoughts of his inmost heart was the thought, that when the bright stone of honour was dim with temptation, his faith alone had saved a woman, who was indeed a precious jewel among women, in finest and noblest qualities of womanhood.

IV.

REDEEMED BY LOVE.

(BITTER FRUIT.)

BITTER FRUIT.*



“Consequences are unpitying.”—GEORGE ELIOT.

THE PROLOGUE.

PARIS.

MADAME THÉODORE, fashionable *modiste*, etc., understood the situation at a moment's glance. It was a splendidly furnished

* This story is founded on a drama of the same title produced at the Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool, on the 6th of October, 1873. The author desires to acknowledge how greatly the success of the play was due to the power, pathos, and tenderness of Miss Bateman's creation of the *rôle* of “Nurse Graham;” nor can he forget the pathetic and manly rendering which the character of “Colonel Murray” received at the hands of the late Mr. Richard Bateman—a life of excellent promise, and a mind of charm and culture, lost in the Eastern seas.

apartment in the Rue Castiglione, into which she, and the grand dress she had brought with her, had been ushered. The depth of Madame's knowledge of human nature was highly creditable, saving always that in width it was limited to that portion of human nature which fell within the scope of her business experience—the vanity of women. She knew that this vanity was equally the begetter of great extravagance and profitable expenditure—of great extravagance and unprofitable results; and she felt, moreover, that the entire *raison d'être* for her own existence in the economy of Parisian life, nay, in the very world itself, lay in that same cardinal sin, vanity.

It would, probably, have interested Madame Théodore, and it would certainly have widened the limits of her knowledge, had she known that her theory, vanity, did not account for the creation of the splendid dress she had brought with her—that its creation, its bedeckings of costly lace and other trimmings, were due, not to

vanity, but to vexation of spirit, to heart-breaking sorrow, to sadness and despair. But, after all, theory would have been of small interest in comparison with the question of practical payment; and Madame's doubt on this point had caused her to accompany the dress to its destination.

"Splendid apartments, no doubt," muttered Madame Théodore, discontentedly; "everything that mortals can want, but money—not a sou, I'll warrant, to bless themselves with—mortals with everything that money can buy always want money—I shall be ruined!" Ruin meant the loss of seventy per cent. clear profit. "This Monsieur Travers, what is he?—a gambler? This Madame Travers, what is she?" And Madame Théodore shrugged her shoulders significantly.

A little innocent-looking provincial maid entered the room. In the mind of Madame Théodore, innocence was another name for ignorance, and from her own vantage-

ground of knowledge she heartily despised the little waiting-maid.

“Madame will see you directly,” said the girl, deferentially. “You’ve brought home the dinner dress?”

“Yes, alas!” replied Madame Théodore.

“Why, alas!”

“Come, my dear,” said Madame Théodore, in tones of great affability; “we dressmakers and maids ought to know one another; we can work so nicely together—you understand. Money all right, hey? Don’t speak—a nod’s enough for me.”

“I think so. Oh yes.”

“I think not—oh no. Who gave you that ring?” she inquired, casting a hungry eagle glance at a ring the little maid held on her finger. “A sweetheart? Lucky girl!”

“No, Madame,” replied the girl, blushing.

“A ring, and not a sweetheart! Still luckier.”

“What’s it worth, Madame?”

“Do you want to sell it?—sell a gift—for

your wages couldn't buy such a ring? Fickle girl—oh, fie ! ”

“ Gift or not, I want to sell it.”

“ You mean, Madame wants to sell it,” replied Madame Théodore with a sudden home-thrust.

“ I never said so,” exclaimed the girl.

“ No, my love ; but I'm as good a judge of the truth as I am of precious stones. Let me look at it ! ” And Madame Théodore snatched the ring from the unwilling maid. “ It's a pretty ring enough—not pure water, though—there's a flaw in that stone ! the setting's old fashioned—a family affair, I should think.”

“ Its value, Madame ? ” the girl asked, anxiously.

“ Hum !—it's about worth what it was meant to pay for—that dress.”

“ Only that ! ”

“ That's twelve hundred francs, my dear, and very moderate. Remember that I am Madame Théodore. You pay for genius in dressmaking, my child, as you pay for it in

painting and the other fine arts. I don't mind twenty francs for your commission ! ”

“ Why, Madame said it cost double that.”

“ Ah, my innocent lamb,” said Madame Théodore, contemptuously, as she returned the ring, “ precious stones are bought for one price and sold for another ; they are bought for whim—they are sold for want. As you will,” she continued, with affected indifference ; “ only recollect that I am a woman, with a woman's sentimental weakness for diamonds. Try the Jews ; their weakness is hard profit.”

“ I don't know where I can go to in Paris,” murmured the girl, “ and Madame wants the money immediately.”

“ She can have it then ; ” and Madame Théodore drew the notes from her pocket. “ Take them, my child, if you will—only be quick about it. I always make a fool of myself over diamonds ; but I dearly love the crispness of bank-notes, and in another minute I may repent.”

“ Here's the ring, Madame.”

“And here’s your twenty francs commission,” said Madame Théodore, graciously; and she placed the ring in her pocket with evident satisfaction. “I think, my dear,” she continued, “you will shortly be in want of another situation.”

“I will never leave Madame—never,” replied the girl, earnestly. “I love her so, poor thing!”

“A very pleasing sentiment, my love; but in all probability she will leave *you*—then come to me. I have great opportunities of recommending girls I like to my customers. By-the-by, character from your last situation?—there might be a demur; no matter, Madame Théodore’s word is enough. I promise you a first-rate situation. Dressmakers and maids, my dear—it’s so nice and pleasant when they work comfortably together. I hear the bell—that means the money. Well, you’ve got the money sooner than could have been expected. Go, my child; alacrity is the essence of faithful service.” And the girl

hurried from the room, with the money for her mistress and the twenty francs as a burden on her little innocent conscience. She would fain have refused the commission, but she was afraid of Madame Théodore's ridicule.

"Can anything be more fortunate?" thought that lady, joyfully, "Madame wanted her money, and she gets it. I wanted my money, and I shall get it, seventy per cent. clear profit—the little maid gets her commission, of twenty francs; the circle of satisfaction is complete, and I get this ring into the bargain."

Madame Théodore drew the ring from her pocket, and gazed gleefully on its sheen—hard as the diamond was that gaze of hers.

"Dear sweet diamonds!" she murmured playfully; "always new, though the setting's old—doubtless a wedding gift to the grand-mamma Travers. Oh, reputable diamonds! and then to her daughter; oh, respectable family diamonds! and then to Madame Travers herself, and so to me—and whither

now? The Palais Royal, most likely; reset and sparkling in some firmament of purple velvet—heaven enough for most women! Oh, dear diamonds, you were so good and virtuous in England, the vanity of chaste and honourable matrons! I tremble for your future life here in Paris.”

Madame Travers entered the room; her dress was radiant—full canary-coloured silk with a subtle emphasis of cerise piping on the deft trimmings; the hand of a mistress, or probably a master, was visible in the grand treatment of detail, outline, and folds. Madame Théodore, with all the meanness of rivalry, was stirred to the depths of her artistic soul; the face of Madame Travers was indeed very weary, very sad and care-worn—but her dress was faultless.

Madame Travers, acknowledging the presence of Madame Théodore, threw herself wearily into a chair.

“ You have brought the dress ? ”

“ Yes, Madame.”

“ You have made the alterations ? ”

“ Will Madame try it on ? ”

“ No, thank you. I dare say it will do. Have you your bill ? ”

“ As Madame pleases; but it’s no matter.”

“ I wish to pay at once.” Madame Travers took the bill and looked at the amount.

“ Rather high, I think, Madame Théodore.”

“ Pardon me, Madame, we never consider cost in dresses of this character; we never solicit patronage: we have our price, which is according to the value of our prestige.”

“ Here’s the money,” replied Madame Travers laconically; “ receipt the bill.”

“ Has Madame any other orders ? ”

“ Not at present—good evening; ” and Madame Travers threw herself back in her chair.

“ Good evening, Madame; thank you for your patronage; ” and Théodore retired towards the door. “ The little maid will soon want another place,” she thought to herself, as she cast one last hard glance

at the weary face and the radiant dress of her English patroness; "it means that Monsieur is tired of Madame. *Mon dieu!* the old story."

"The moment Monsieur comes in," said Madame Travers to the little maid, "run over to the *restaurant* and see that they bring the supper directly—very hot, mind; the champagne was too much iced last time; do take care, Louise, Monsieur is so very particular."

"I'll take care, Madame. Shall I take the new dress to your room?"

"Yes."

Of course Louise couldn't help opening the milliner's basket.

"Oh, Madame, how lovely! such beautiful trimmings! Madame will look so handsome; wouldn't Madame have just one peep?"

"Don't trouble me, Louise; take away the dress."

"Oh, Madame, it is so very charming!"

"Go, Louise, I tell you; I wish to be

alone." And Louise obeyed, marvelling much how her mistress could resist the fascination of such a beautiful dress; and in the bitterness of her sorrow Madame Travers marvelled also.

"A new dress," she murmured; "how I loved dress once! those old days; the rapture of a new dress—the delight of a new dress—the delicious vanity of a new dress. It's no delight now—no vanity, Heaven knows, but the hard struggle of a weary heart to draw that man's cold eyes and absent thoughts back to me, through the novelty of some new costume. Can it be possible? What! three short months, and the profession of an eternal love converted into a miserable lie? and yet, lie as it is, I must cling to it, feign to believe it, smile on it; for there's nothing left me in this world but that lie. The love's gone; how long will the lie last? How can I eke it out? How can I stave off that day when he will leave me, that day when the lie will be at an end, and I shall have to face the

fearful truth? Alone, then! no, not alone, there'll be death at my side that day; but if death be so close, then repentance. How can I repent? Tears!" She started up and gazed with terror in the glass. "Tears, red eyes—he'll turn from me in disgust." She rang the bell; Louise entered.

"My powder puff, quickly."

"Yes, Madame." Louise hurried from the room, and quickly returned with the puff.

"My hair is ruffled; put it right, Louise. Monsieur may return at any moment, quickly! My face, is it all right?"

"Yes, Madame."

"I don't look as if I had been crying, do I?"

"No, Madame. Has Madame been crying?" the girl asked, with sympathy.

"No, no—I've not been crying," she replied in harsh tone; "I only thought I looked as if I had. Why should I cry, Louise? I've everything to make me happy. Cry, indeed! absurd nonsense. His step!" she exclaimed, listening in-

tently; "he's coming at last, thank Heaven! at last, at last. The supper quickly, Louise; very hot, and the champagne, you know."

"I'll take care, Madame," and the girl ran out of the room.

The steps echoed along the corridor; her heart beat, and she trembled from head to foot with anxiety. She knew, alas, too late, that the man she was so anxiously expecting was a liar, a blackleg, and a gambler; her *one* grievous crime had levelled her to his low estate; and save but for that one crime, she was honest, and truthful, and high-minded, and a lady still, with all the delicate feelings, and instincts, and customs of *home* life clinging to her; and yet she must needs cling to this man with desperation, for she felt that he alone stood between her and utter perdition.

The steps were at the door—the steps passed the door, and Upton Travers did not come. Sick at heart, she rang the bell; the supper must not be brought over, lest it should get cold before he arrived.

“You must wait, Louise; I made a mistake. Monsieur has not returned,” and she threw herself on the sofa. Louise saw the tears in her eyes.

“Monsieur will be here presently,” the girl said in a cheerful voice, “I’m sure he will.”

“Do you think so, Louise—do you really think so?”

“A little patience, Madame; that’s all. Perhaps Monsieur is detained by the rain.”

“Does it rain?”

“A dreadful night.”

“Ah, well, perhaps it is the rain that detains him.”

“Won’t Madame take something—just a little?” said the girl, coaxingly.

“I’m not hungry, Louise.”

“But Madame has positively taken nothing all day.”

“When Monsieur returns, I shall have supper.” And then in weary listlessness she asked the girl about her home in Brittany. “Have you got a father and mother, Louise?”

“ Oh yes, Madame.”

“ And they are very fond of you ? ”

“ Very, very fond,” the girl answered with warmth.

“ If you were unhappy here, Louise ? ”

“ Unhappy ! But Madame is so kind and good ! ”

“ I say, if you were unhappy, what should you do ? ”

“ I should go home, Madame.”

“ They would be glad to see you, I suppose ? ”

“ They would be so very glad.”

“ And you'd see your brothers and sisters ? ”

“ Oh yes, Madame ; and the dear good old *curé*, he's quite as fond of me as my own father ; he prepared me for my first communion, and he blessed me before I went away ; and he told me to be good and honest, and——”

“ Yes, yes, Louise, that will do—you can go now. I wish to be alone.”

And the girl went ; she too was crying at the remembrances of her village home.

“Go home! That girl can go home,” cried the miserable woman in bitter sorrow, “and my home is encircled with a curse. I was *his* favourite child; he would do for me what he wouldn’t do for the others, always what I wanted; his pet, his idol—and now my name must never be uttered in his presence. My brothers, they would have died for me. Had any one dared to say or do aught against me, with their quick blood, it would have been a blow; they’ll only shrink away with shame now. Oh, my sister! the old days—one heart, one soul between us; our life in childhood, our life as girls; the same thoughts, the same feelings; and now only scorn and contempt.” Her restless, feverish hands half unconsciously drew a letter from her pocket. “My sister’s letter! how bitter, how relentless; not one word of pity. She must know I want pity. That’s right; drive home the bitter words, heap up the coals of fire! I’ll answer it! it’s so rude not to answer letters.” She started up, seized pen and paper, and wrote with rapid hand:—

“MY DEAREST SISTER,

“Your sympathy is all misplaced. I am very happy—*very* happy. I possess all I desire—endless devotion from one who has sworn to be for ever true, and who will be for ever true to his oath——”

“A note, Madame,” said Louise, entering the room. “A woman brought it—shall she wait?”

“Let her wait, Louise,” and the girl left the room.

“Upton’s hand!” exclaimed Madame Travers, gazing with terror at the hurried pencil direction. “What does it mean?” She tore open the envelope, and scanned the note with eager eyes:—

“DEAREST,

“Only time for a word. A run of cursed luck. I must leave you for a few days; I shall soon return. I dare not say more; I am forced to fly. Ever affectionately yours,

“UPTON TRAVERS.”

She staggered to a chair. "It's all over! the lie is at an end. Coward! mean, pitiful coward! He did not dare to face me. Gone! alone now! Heaven help me! I've never been alone in my whole life, always some one or some influence to protect me, some shelter between me and the outside world; and now I must encounter all alike; that veil of family life, which hid me from the rough gaze of the world, plucked from my face. Impossible! I can't endure it. I must cling to him; he must, in very mercy, give me shelter and protection. I'll beg and pray on my knees to go with him—anywhere, anyhow, but not alone." She rang the bell. "Where's the woman who brought the note? Send her in; quick, Louise, quick!"

Louise ushered the woman in—old, haggard, squalid—a beggar; but the woman was not abashed by the splendour of the room or the grand dress of Madame Travers. Hungering for bread, and yet with a cynical smile gathering on her wrinkled lips.

“The gentleman who gave you this note—where is he?” exclaimed Madame Travers, with intense anxiety.

“I don’t know, Madame,” replied the woman, sullenly.

“Tell me all you do know, for mercy’s sake.”

“He called me to the cab-door—‘Deliver this note,’ he said; ‘they’ll give you five francs,’—that’s all I know.”

“Did you hear where the cab was going?”

“No.”

“Try to recollect—do try to recollect.”

“The train, I think.”

“What station?”

“I didn’t hear—‘five francs’ were his last words.”

“I’d have given you fifty francs—a hundred francs, if you’d heard!”

“I wish I had—it would have been brandy; and that’s bread and meat to me now,” chuckled the woman. “But for you, what’s the odds? He’s gone. When these men go—they go—it’s all over—nay,

the old story; the story of thousands of women—my story!—my story to the very letter; only it was a diligence that took him away, not the train.”

“Silence, woman!” exclaimed Madame Travers, starting back in horror. “Go—go, I say.”

“Yes, yes. I’ll go fast enough when I get my five francs,” answered the woman, vindictively. “Needn’t be so mighty grand, my fine lady. I’ve lived in as good a room as this, and had as fine a dress, and finer, too. You’ve heard tell of the *Merveilleuses*. We knew what dress was in those days—and fine living too—that we did! we and our friends, those fine gentlemen, Messieurs *les Incroyables*!”

“Make her go, Louise—give her the five francs; my purse is on the table. For Heaven’s sake, make her go!” and Madame Travers stopped her ears against the woman’s horrible talk.

“I’ll go—I’ll go,” muttered the woman, with an angry scowl. “Be insolent, with

your rosy lips ; grovel in the kennel when those lips are withered."

Louise hustled the woman out of the room, and watched her down the stairs. Madame Travers was left alone ; she threw herself on the sofa, and clasped her hands in despair.

"His cursed work is done !" she murmured, "and that wretched woman, his messenger, stands before me, a mirror of my life to come ; her story—my story—her past, my future. Heaven help me ! this cannot be. What's to be done ? Debt, first. I'll sell all I have ; Heaven grant it may be enough to pay everything ; and then I'll work—needlework—a servant—hard work, any drudgery, so it be honest. Alas, who'll take me ! Your character ? They turn away ! No, no," she cried, vehemently. "I have erred before God and man ; but I don't belong to that sad sisterhood—I don't indeed, I swear I don't ; they can't claim me—I have no fellowship with them—no fellowship, God be praised."

She was alone in that room ; but she seemed to be pleading her cause at the bar of public opinion. The good women she had known, the friends of her past life, rose before her in all the sternness of their inflexible morality. She herself had felt no mercy in her days of virtue ; she herself had felt loathing, scorn, and shrinking contempt for those who had fallen ; she saw the smile of incredulity gathering on the faces of the judges her terror had conjured up ; she heard the answer to her protest—a chorus of vindictive triumph : “ Our sister, our sister,” cried those women she had scorned, “ come to us—no room for subtle difference—all nice distinctions are merged in your one crime. You’ve crossed the narrow streamlet ; tramp on with us, it quickly widens downwards to the ocean of all crime ; walk for ever on our side.” And she beheld condemnation written in her judges’ eyes. “ No,” she cried, with feverish resolution, “ I’ll go back—back, at once—back by the only way—the one terrible way,

back by Death's bridge. Death's a crime, they say—not when it's a crime to live; no home; no refuge; the choice of shame or death—then be it death! Oh, shame, make me brave in the fear of thee! Oh, death, you always seemed so terrible in past days—so terrible when my mother died—I go to thee! Where shall I find you?—the river? Yes; one plunge.” She rang the bell; Louise entered.

“My hat and cloak.”

“Is Madame going out? Madame will want a cab; it's a fearful night.”

“It won't hurt me, Louise,” she answered, with an hysterical laugh. That tragedy of a laugh! the laugh of Anne Boleyn, when she clasped her hands round her slender neck.

“But Madame is so delicate,” persisted Louise.

“My old hat and cloak—they won't spoil; not the fur lining; quick!” As she turned from the girl, who went to obey her behest, her eye fell on the letter she had begun to write to her sister.

“I’ll finish it,” she said; and she sat at the table. “When my sister reads it, she’ll be very sorry; when *they* read it, no more hard words, no more curses then; but the old days—the old feelings will all come back, and they’ll be very, very sorry; death will have washed away my sin.” She took up her pen and finished the letter. “I repeat, I am happy, very happy—Your affectionate sister, Margaret. Give my best love to my father, Frank, and Harry.” “They will be glad of that message,” she murmured, “when they know I am dead.” In her mind’s eye she forecast the arrival of the letter at her home; the tearful, sorrowing group—father, brothers, sister—she knew what each would say; the old breakfast-room, the old butler who had known and loved her from a child. The vision was painfully vivid and real; she could touch the old accustomed cups and saucers, Queen Charlotte’s blue Worcester pattern, the old-fashioned urn, the old quaint green-handled knives, the old brown Bible,

the faded cover of Bishop Blomfield's "Family Prayers," the faithful old colley dozing on the hearth-rug. She had returned home; she was with them again; death, with its amenity, had made her once more the spoilt idol of their hearts.

Louise entered with her hat and cloak; the vision faded—she closed the letter.

"Post this the first thing to-morrow morning," she said, in deliberate tone; "it's very important. I haven't got a stamp; but here's the money." She laid a franc on the letter. "You can keep the change; and now you can go to bed," she added, "I shan't require you any more."

"Oh, Madame, let me sit up for you," said the girl, imploringly.

"Obey me, Louise, do you hear." The girl left the room, awed by her mistress's voice. In all probability that girl would be the last human being she would ever speak to, and she had dismissed her with harsh tones. The girl's wages! She sat down, and enclosed the sum due in an envelope.

The rent of the apartments ! The landlady would take possession of her goods, and so be paid. She felt her work in life was finished. She rose from the chair and put on cloak and hat, and then, with old custom strong to the last, she looked at herself in the glass and carefully adjusted her dress ; she looked, as of custom also, at her face. Many a time—daily in the past, and many times a day, had the mirror responded to the vanity of her heart with a gracious benediction, “ Go forth, fair face, and fascinate many with your brightness and your charms.” Pale and hard-drawn with the tension of desperate resolution, was the face she now beheld. She had never seen *that* face before ; she could not help gazing on it, it was so new and strange, and terrible. But the mirror could not reveal that sadder sight beyond all ken of human eyes ; she could not see how a cowardly, absorbing, abject care of *self*—of her own misery, her own degradation, was hurrying her on to crown a great crime with a greater

crime, self-destruction. She forced herself away from the mirror with a shudder—her awful resolution was not shaken; and now to the river to meet death!

She was destined, indeed, to meet the dark shadow, but not in the cowardly manner she had purposed. Alone and deserted in the world, she was being mercifully cared for, though she knew it not. Her resolution was to remain unchanged, but its darkness was to be turned to light; its gloomy sacrifice for the sake of self, changed into noble self-sacrifice for the sake of others; the path of redemption and repentance was being prepared for her steps.

As she stood on the threshold of the door, the girl, pale with alarm and agitation, hurried up to her.

“Oh, Madame, something so dreadful has happened!”

“What’s the matter, Louise?”

“We must all go this very night—this moment!”

“What do you mean?”

“The doctor has just said so; no one must remain in these rooms. Madame Valnay is fearfully ill.”

“Our landlady?”

“Yes, Madame—malignant scarlet fever; we must go at once. I can go to my uncle’s at Passy. Madame will let me go as soon as possible. I’m so frightened.”

“Go, Louise, as soon as you can.”

“It’s very sad,” continued the girl, with tears in her eyes. “Poor thing! it’s such a fearful disease; no one will stay to nurse her.”

“What do you say?”

“They’re all afraid; the doctor will try to get one of the good Sisters to come. I’ll pack up madame’s things this moment.”

“Pack up your own things, Louise; don’t touch mine;” and Madame Travers threw off her hat and cloak. “Where is this poor woman?” she asked.

“In the little room at the end of the passage, all by herself. Oh, but Madame mustn’t go near her, indeed she mustn’t;

it would be so dangerous. Surely, Madame is going to leave here as soon as possible?"

"No, Louise. I am going to remain."

"Oh, but if you were to catch the fever and die; think of your parents in England—your brothers and sisters."

"I have no parents, Louise; no brothers and sisters."

"But, perhaps Madame left a little child in England?"

"No, Louise," she answered, with convulsive effort. "I have no child—no child, I tell you; I am alone—quite alone. Pack up your own things at once and go; here are your wages. Good-bye! you've been a very good girl. One moment. We shall, probably, never meet again. If you are ever tempted to do anything wrong, promise me to think of your father and mother, your brothers and sisters, and the good *curé*; it may save you if you do—promise me, Louise."

"I will, Madame," said the girl, earnestly. "You have been very kind and good to me.

I'm sure I'd stay and help nurse that poor woman, if I wasn't so afraid of death; but they'd all be so sorry at home if I died—so very sorry. Oh, Madame! I can't stay, indeed I can't. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Louise;" and the girl hurried away, with tears in her eyes and a sense of cowardice withal in her heart, to pack up and leave the house as soon as possible.

So in the strong love of kith and kin, which made life so sweet and death so awful, Louise fled from encountering the ordeal which stood before her. Many have so fled—good, and pure, and excellent, yet cowards in that strong love. But the presence of death in that house, which was so terrible to the little provincial girl, brought consolation and redemption to Margaret Travers; she still, indeed, sought death, but now, God be thanked, it was death ennobled—death for the sake of another—not wicked, cowardly, self-death, but life freely ventured that another might live. So the dark, mean, narrow thought of "self," with

its heavy burden of sin and sorrow, passed away from her soul ; not *self* henceforth, but oblivion of self—self, buried in the woes and sufferings of others ; and in the redeeming power of self-sacrifice, and full of noble purpose and strong devotion, she entered the room of the sick and deserted woman, and became her faithful and unwearying nurse.

CHAPTER I.

SCUTARI—THE CRIMEAN WAR—MORNING.

IN stress of accommodation for the sick and wounded, a palace of the Sultan at Scutari had been converted into a convalescent hospital. It was a long range of buildings; the best rooms opened on to a wide terrace planted with many varieties of eastern trees, cypress, palms, and the like, which afforded a pleasant shady lounging-place for the invalids, who could be easily carried out on their beds or easy-chairs from the adjoining rooms. Indeed, during the day the terrace became a sort of open-air hospital, for those who were well enough to be moved. One angle of the palace had been specially devoted to

the use of two or three officers who had been very dangerously wounded.

The locality was very lovely; charming glimpses of the Bosphorus through the trees, with a background of minaret and cupola. The building had been "built for pleasure and for state;" its gaudiness of eastern decoration intermingled in strange contrast with the stern purpose of its present use, costly carpets and rough camp beds; the softness of luxury, the hardness of war; and, stranger contrast still, in the very place where women had spent their lives in one monotonous round of sensual degradation, women worked and suffered, and died in devotion to a noble cause.

The Sister Superior of this Scutari hospital, who held supreme rule over the women nurses, was a lady of indefatigable zeal and enthusiasm; excellent and thoroughly skilled as a practical worker, excellent too as an organizer of the work of others, full of calm, quiet persistent power, which enabled her to break through

the ingenious knottings of red-tape officialism, and also to govern her own staff with despotic rule—though the despotism was ever hidden beneath a sweet, endearing sympathetic smile, from the presence of which insubordination shrank abashed.

Her gracious and thoughtful presence pervaded the whole hospital. People never knew when she slept; like a zealous commander, she was ever on her rounds among the many outposts of pain and distress, ready for every emergency, with skilful palliatives or assuaging sympathy. The red glow of early morning, which fell on the day concerning which our tale is to be told, found her on the terrace visiting room by room; she was about to visit the last room in the angle of the building, which was somewhat apart from the other rooms, when a cheery voice broke on her ear:

“Egad, madam, always at your post; can’t catch you asleep!”

“But you, Doctor Sholto,” she answered

with surprise—"what accounts for your presence here at this time of the morning?"

"Twelve hours' leave; a swift caique from Pera. How's poor Murray?"

"I am glad to say Colonel Murray seems to be making progress."

"I've not been able to find Bentley—what's his report?" inquired Sholto, anxiously.

"Alas! very sad. Dr. Bentley says the eyesight is hopelessly lost."

"Poor fellow!" replied Sholto, with deep feeling.

"Our doctors have every hope of ultimate recovery, save and except eyesight. Would you like to see the Colonel?"

"I came over for that very purpose. I'm his oldest friend."

"His room is here; this last room on the terrace."

"Perhaps he's asleep," observed Sholto; "I hope he is, it's the best thing for him. Let's hear what the nurse says?"

"I'll call her," replied the Sister Superior.

She went up to the window, and, drawing slightly apart the heavy curtains which were used in lieu of casements, looked into the room.

“Both asleep,” she said in a low voice.

“That nurse has no business to sleep,” exclaimed Sholto, with some asperity.

“We must forgive her, Doctor,” replied the Sister, in kindly tone. “She’s almost worn herself to death with close attendance ; she’s the only person he can bear about him. Dr. Bentley says her nursing has saved his life.”

“Like enough,” exclaimed Sholto. “Good nursing and good air—woman’s devotion and nature’s medicine—better than all the drugs in the pharmacopœia.” He went up to the curtains and peered into the room. “Seems a little stuffy, don’t it ? Suppose we draw back the curtains gently ; he can’t have too much air.”

Sholto and the Sister accordingly drew back the curtains. Colonel Murray was sleeping quietly on a camp bed ; the nurse

was sleeping in a large arm-chair near the foot of the bed. Sholto entered the room and regarded the Colonel with professional scrutiny; he then rejoined the Sister outside.

“Quiet sleep,” he remarked; “breathing regular; that’s all to the good. So that nurse has done good service, has she?”

“Inestimable service! Depend upon it, by Heaven’s blessing, she has saved his life.”

“His life saved by a woman,” exclaimed Sholto with some bitterness of tone. “His life cursed by a woman! Oh, you women, what are you—angels?”

“No, Doctor.”

“The other things, pardon me?”

“No, Doctor.”

“What then?”

“Both,” she answered with a serious smile. “Therefore be merciful to us women. I know something of his story; his wife left him.”

“Yes—divorced; he was a proud man,

and it broke him down ; a hard man, you might call him, but I knew him from a boy. Would to Heaven she had known him as well as I know him ; would to Heaven he had known her better ! ”

“ You knew her, Doctor ? ”

“ Both before and after her marriage.”

“ Was there any good in such a woman ? ”

“ Good and evil,” he answered in a sad tone. “ Let’s be merciful. Evil enough for sin, good enough for remorse when the time comes ; but I fear that time has not yet come. Where shall I be likely to find Bentley ? ”

“ Second ward, I think ; a very interesting and involved case.”

“ I’ll look for him. Be kind enough to let me know when the Colonel wakes.”

“ I will direct the nurse to send for you ; ” and Sholto departed.

“ Hard man, was he ? ” murmured the Sister Superior, looking towards the sleeping invalid. “ Greatly changed now, poor soul ; meek enough, in all conscience. Surely I

must have met that Mrs. Murray, years ago, in society? Gay and frivolous, they say. I wonder if she too is changed—if she has yet learnt the bitterness of heart that follows the laughter of sin? Let's hope it." She went up to the room and called the nurse in a low tone.

"Graham!"

"Yes, Sister," exclaimed the nurse, starting up from her chair, dazed with sleep. "Forgive me for dozing—it was only a few minutes. The Colonel fell asleep at dawn; a very restless night, very restless."

"Mind wandering?" inquired the Sister; "talking in his sleep?"

"Yes."

"That fearful Inkerman, and the trenches?"

"No, Sister; his wife."

"That woman who deserted him?"

"That woman who deserted him, and his child," replied the nurse, with tears stealing from her eyes.

"Yes, Graham; his story is a very sad

one. I see it affects you deeply ; more deeply, perhaps, than can could be expected from a woman of even your feeling heart. I want you to be frank with me. You too have a story ! ”

“ Oh no, Sister ! ” replied the nurse, with a scared expression.

“ Yes, yes—a story as sad as his,” repeated the Sister ; “ I’m sure of it. Oh, do confide in me ! ” and she drew Graham to her in kindly manner. “ I don’t ask to know your story out of idle curiosity, I only wish to afford you some consolation. Your invalid is asleep ; let us sit here and talk a while.” She led Graham to a garden bench.

Graham showed some slight reluctance.

“ Nay, nay, I insist ; remember, I am Sister Superior. You must obey.”

She put her arm round Graham’s waist, and with gentle force compelled her to sit.

“ You came to us from St. Bartholomew’s ? ”

“ I have tried to do my best,” murmured Graham.

“ My dear lady—— ”

“ I’m only a paid nurse, Sister,” exclaimed Graham, in a tone of deprecation.

“ Let me call you lady; I have long recognized your position in life.”

“ I have always worked as the others work.”

“ Far more,” replied the Sister earnestly; “ never flinching when others flinched from menial and distressing work, never complaining when others grumbled at hardship and privation, helping by your example, animating by your zeal, insensibly commanding by your admirable tact—all these things revealed to me your true position in life—a lady. I said to myself, ‘ This woman works thus, either in the mighty strength of love and sympathy for human suffering, or from bitterness of heart, which seeks oblivion of sorrow in labours of love.’ If it be the first motive, let me acknowledge the worth of your example to us all; if it be the last, let me try to afford you some of that comfort you have so freely given to

others—to that poor sufferer yonder. Come, my dear lady, let this kiss, a woman's kiss of truest sympathy, open to me the power of consolation." The Sister kissed Graham's lips with a full, fervent kiss.

"Bless you for that kiss," said Graham, bursting into tears; and she sank on her knees at the Sister's feet.

"You are overwrought," said the Sister, raising her gently—"worn out with this long course of nursing. I mean to exercise my authority and send you away for a time."

"No, no, Sister," exclaimed Graham with sudden energy; "I am quite well and strong—quite well; it was only your kindness which affected me."

"I've been to blame for letting you work so long in this hard manner. I think I can read," she continued seriously, "the inner motive of your heart—'Let death come quickly, I don't care how soon.' It's not a right feeling; believe me, it's not right. Granted that a wrong, a great wrong—I

don't seek to know its history—has been done to you. Who knows but that the heart of the wrongdoer may be touched at last; reparation may be made, happiness may yet be in store for you!”

“Never, Sister, never. Impossible!”

“All things are possible,” replied the Sister earnestly; “have faith, and let me add, forgiveness also, which is God's greatest gift to man.”

“Graham, Graham!” cried Colonel Murray from the room.

Graham started up to go to the invalid.

“One moment,” said the Sister, detaining her. “As soon as the Colonel is ready, tell him that Dr. Sholto would like to see him.”

“Dr. Sholto!” exclaimed Graham.

“The Colonel's oldest friend,” continued the Sister. “Why do you start? he's just come over from the Pera hospital.”

“If I started, it wasn't at that,” replied Graham, striving to regain her self-possession. “I was thinking of what you were

saying just now; perhaps you are right, perhaps I ought to have relief—rest for a short time.”

“Graham, too much light! too much light!” cried the Colonel, impatiently.

“I’m coming, Colonel, coming!” and Graham hurried into the sick room, and closed the curtains over the window.

“Yes, poor soul,” said the Sister Superior, as she marked the anxiety of the nurse to minister to her patient’s comfort. “Happiness is in store for you, though you believe it not. A minute more and I would have told you of this letter—it is almost time for the writer to be here.” She took a letter from her pocket and looked over it; it was to this effect:—

“MADAM,

“I have reason to believe that a lady in whom I am deeply interested is acting, under an assumed name, as a common nurse in the Scutari hospital. I do not know what her assumed name may be. I venture

to request the favour of an interview with you on the subject. For reasons which I will not now explain, I desire to conceal my real name. I shall for the time assume the name of

“LESLIE.”

A nurse entered and informed the Sister that a Mr. Leslie desired to see her.

“In my parlour!” she exclaimed. “Well, no matter, I’ll see him here; it will save me a journey to the other end of the palace.”

Mr. Leslie was introduced; the Sister rose to meet him. She saw at a glance that the stranger was a person of cultivated manners.

“Good morning, sir. I have received your letter—pray be seated.” She motioned him to a garden-chair near the bench on which she sat. “Will you give me some description of the lady in whom you are interested?”

“Light wavy hair,” he answered, “bright laughing eyes, sweet fascinating smile which pervades the whole countenance.”

“There is no lady here, sir, that answers to that description.”

“Indeed, madam!” he exclaimed with surprise; “my information was very precise.”

“No, sir; laughing eyes and smiles have no place here; we deal in stern things, which turn smiles and laughter into tears and sighs.”

“Strange I should be misinformed,” he muttered.

“I will be plain with you, sir. What is the purpose of your coming here?”

“Reparation for a great wrong,” he answered in deliberate tone.

“A good purpose, sir.”

“Reparation, I swear it; ample reparation. I have been a sad wretch; I deserted her—I——”

“I do not desire a confession,” replied the Sister. “Enough, if you assure me of your repentance.”

“Again I swear it,” he exclaimed in fervent manner; “reparation and repent-

ance. I will not, for her sake, enter into the details of the sad matter."

"Again, sir, I have no desire to know them."

"Do you think this lady is here?" he asked eagerly.

"There is a lady here," she answered, "a lady not with bright laughing eyes and fascinating smile, but with eyes full of devotion and tenderness, and, if a smile at all, a smile of sympathy; a lady who is literally sacrificing her life for the sake of others—ever striving to alleviate suffering and sorrow, wearing out her life in this great service. Do you think this is the lady you seek?"

"No, madam, no," he answered, in disappointed tone.

"Pardon me, I think it is," she continued with quiet deliberation. "Come, sir, you know best, in the depths of your own conscience, whether you have inflicted upon this lady that bitterness of sorrow which causes a mean nature to grovel in despair,

which forces a noble nature to forget despair in deeds of love and mercy.”

“Alas ! madam, I have wronged her deeply.”

“Can you assure me that you repent this wrong, whatever it may be ?”

“I can, madam. I have travelled a long way for this purpose ; I swear it—solemnly swear it.”

“Do it, sir—not swear it,” she answered with emphasis ; “repentance by acts, not words. Well, I believe—I am not sure, but I believe—when a fitting time comes, I shall be able to restore to you a woman, not with smiles and laughing eyes, but a woman schooled in the ways of noblest sorrow, worthy of the highest reverence. May you prove worthy of her !”

“Amen !” he answered, with fervour. “When may I see her ?”

“When her duties permit. You must be good enough to wait patiently. Inquire for my private room—I will take you to see her at a fitting time.”

“Bless you, madam,” he exclaimed, warmly, “for your goodness to her and to me. I have been a great sinner—I confess it, to my shame—but, by Heaven’s blessing, I swear——”

“Again, sir—deeds, not words. I have my duties to attend to; I wish you good morning for the present.”

He bowed and left her.

“That man’s heart is touched,” thought the Sister; “I don’t think I can be deceived. Let’s pray it may be so. Graham must be the woman he seeks; we have no other lady among the ordinary nurses. Poor soul! I trust there may still be happiness in store for her. I’m sure he seems sincere.”

The Sister Superior was quite right: the man she had been conversing with, did *seem* sincere; but Upton Travers had a wonderful capacity for *seeming*, and had thus been enabled to deceive many clever men, as well as women.

The curtains of Colonel Murray’s room were drawn aside, and the invalid was led

on to the terrace supported by two orderlies. Graham wheeled out an easy chair for his use, into which he was duly ensconced, with all the comfort of soft pillows carefully arranged by her skilful hands.

“Good morning, Colonel. I hope you are better to-day,” said the Sister Superior, in a pleasant voice.

“It’s the Sister Superior, sir,” whispered Graham in the blind man’s ear.

“Good morning, ma’am,” replied the Colonel, striving to assume a cheerful voice. “I’m better, I think—a little better—don’t get all the sleep I ought. However, thanks to Bentley’s sleeping draught, I’ve had a fair night, thank God.”

“I hope you have all that you require?”

“Everything, ma’am—everything; and you’ve given me the best nurse in all the world. I’m afraid I’m wearing her out, though.”

“Oh no, Colonel; indeed you’re not,” exclaimed Graham, earnestly.

“We invalids are selfish dogs, and that’s

the truth of it," replied the Colonel. "You must send her away, ma'am; she wants rest, I'm sure she does."

"You're quite right, Colonel," said the sister; "we must take care of her, for she won't take care of herself. Go and lie down, Graham; I'll remain with the Colonel, till Simpson comes."

"I'm not in the least tired, Sister; indeed I'm not."

"I insist upon it, Graham—I will be obeyed—go at once!"

"Right, ma'am—right," exclaimed the Colonel, in a tone of humour. "Now then, Graham, right about face—march—to bed."

Graham withdrew into the Colonel's room, but lingered there on pretence of arranging the clothes and bed.

"A letter came for you late last night, Colonel," said the Sister, taking a letter from her pocket. "Would you like me to read it? The address is written in a large round hand—a child's hand, I think."

“Minnie’s writing! I’m sure it is,” he exclaimed, with glee. “Do read it, ma’am—*no*, give it me first!” He took the letter eagerly from her hand, and kissed the envelope fervently. “Yes, yes; it is Minnie’s writing; I can see that—I mean *feel* that,” he added, with a sigh, and he gave the letter back to the Sister. “Read it, ma’am!—do read it! he exclaimed, impatiently; “it’ll do me more good than all the doctor’s stuff—read it, there’s a dear lady!”

The Sister was about to comply with his anxious wish, when an orderly entered with a summons demanding her immediate presence in one of the wards.

“I’m afraid, Colonel, I must run away. I’ll come back as soon as possible. Graham!” she exclaimed, catching sight of the nurse in the room; “as you’re not gone, you must stay with the Colonel till Simpson relieves you. By the way, Colonel, as you are so anxious to hear the letter at once, would you have any objection to

Graham reading it to you—I am sure she is a person in whom you may place every confidence?”

“Certainly—certainly!” exclaimed the Colonel, with feverish impatience; “let her read it—for God’s sake, let some one read it! my one comfort—my only love!”

“The Colonel wishes you to read this letter to him, Graham.” The Sister gave the letter to the nurse, and withdrew, followed by the orderly.

Graham looked with tearful eyes at the envelope, and then pressed it to her lips.

“Now, Graham; come, Graham. Put a chair close to me. Sit down and read it, there’s a good woman. It’s a letter from my little girl—my only treasure. She’s got no mother, poor dear! Begin, Graham.”

“One moment, Colonel!” Graham brushed the tears from her eyes, and governing her voice as best she could, began to read the letter. “Dear Papa,—I hope you are a little better. I often think about you. I do so want to come and nurse you.”

“Bless her! bless her!” said the Colonel.

“I am very happy here—I’m so fond of the big doll you gave me.”

“The biggest doll I could buy, Graham : blue eyes and golden hair—Minnie’s eyes ! Minnie’s hair ! Alas, her mother’s eyes, her mother’s hair !

“I put her to bed regularly every night, and on Saturday morning nurse lets me wash all her clothes.”

“The young puss,” exclaimed the Colonel, with a laugh. “A pretty mess of soap-suds, I’ll warrant.”

“Still I should so like to be with you and mamma again.”

“I told you she had no mother, Graham,” said the Colonel, in broken tones. “Pshaw! I dare say you’ve heard the real story. Her mother left me ! left her child ! You’re a good woman, Graham—tried and true : you can understand the meaning of the words, ‘left her child.’ Go on.”

“I wish you and dear mamma would come home, and then we should be all so

happy together." Graham insensibly sank from the chair on to her knees.

"Poor child! wretched mother!" cried the Colonel. "Go on, Graham."

"Do let mamma come and see me once more. Nurse says I shall never see her again—never, not even in Heaven, where I shall see dear grandpapa, and Aunt Mary—but not mamma." Graham clenched her hands over her mouth, and tried in vain to stifle her sobs.

"It's very painful," said the Colonel, "the poor child's innocent prattle. You see, she was too young to be told the terrible truth; but she'll know it one day—know the story of her mother's sin—know why she can never see her mother again. Pray, finish, Graham."

"Oh, Colonel, forgive me—I can't read any more, it's too painful!" She started convulsively to her feet. "What! never again—never again on this earth?" she asked, in painful tones.

"Never, Graham—never!"

“Never in heaven? But, if she repent—God help this wretched woman—if she repent?”

“Repent! vain, miserable, frivolous coquette!” replied the Colonel in a tone of bitter contempt.

She answered his hard words with vehement protest: her voice was raised to a painful pitch; her form dilated with agony and despair. “But, I say, if she repents; if she casts away that sin; if she gives her life to God’s service; to hard work for the sake of others; to labours of love and mercy; sacrificing her very life. What!” she cried, in heartrending tones of anguish and despair, “never in heaven—never in heaven!” Her voice produced a terrible effect on Colonel Murray; his countenance was flushed with rage. Weak as he was, he struggled to his feet.

“Graham!” he exclaimed, “where are you? Send her away! *that* woman! *that* wretch! Graham, I say, where are you?”

“Here, sir,” she answered, terror-stricken at the effect of her words.

“Send her away, I tell you—send her away—not the pollution of her presence here——”

“There is no one here, sir; we are alone.”

“I heard her voice, I tell you. I heard her voice.”

“No one has been here but myself.”

“Not that accursed woman who was once my wife?”

“No, Colonel, only Graham—your nurse; no one else has been here, I assure you.”

“Good heavens, is it possible!” he exclaimed in bewilderment. “Your voice, when you spoke just now, was *her* voice—her very voice. I’ll swear to it.”

“Perhaps, Colonel, that letter recalled the past, and all its sorrow.”

“Perhaps, perhaps,” he answered, feebly; “but it’s very strange, my mind is quite dazed. Oh, all this excitement is too much for me. I can’t bear it. Graham, your

arm!" She clasped her arm round him and tenderly helped him back to his old position. He felt the comfort of her assistance in his great weakness. "Graham," he murmured, in faint voice, "you're a good woman, tried and true. Heaven has sent you to me in my sad affliction. If I ever recover and go back to England, you must be Minnie's nurse—Minnie's nurse—promise me," and he fell back in the heavy exhaustion of sore debility, with his head resting on her arm.

After a time she gently laid his head upon the pillow, and sank down on her knees at his side, covering her face with her hands.

"Vain, frivolous, miserable coquette," she murmured. "Never again on earth! never in heaven!" And while he slept, she kept vigil with the remorse that gnawed her heart.

Dr. Bentley, the medical officer in charge of that section of the hospital, suddenly came upon her in going his rounds.

“What’s the matter, Graham?” he inquired, seeing her on her knees.

“I was merely picking up this letter which I had dropped,” she answered. “A letter from the Colonel’s little girl in England. The Sister desired me to read it to him, but it was almost more than he could bear.”

“Dear, dear,” said Dr. Bentley, with impatience, as he marked the Colonel’s exhausted condition. “This is very wrong; he ought to be kept perfectly quiet; you should have stopped reading when you saw the letter affected him. A little discretion, my good woman—a little discretion; remember, violent agitation might be fatal at any moment.”

“I’ll be very careful, sir—very careful. It shan’t occur again,” she answered, with tears in her eyes.

“There, there, don’t cry. I know you try to do your best. You can go now, and wait in the Colonel’s room. The Colonel has a visitor.” In obedience to the doctor’s

order, Graham retired to the Colonel's room. Bentley waved his hand, and Sholto joined him.

"Here he is, poor fellow," said Bentley, "you see him at his worst; he's been upset, most unfortunately, through the nurse reading to him a letter from his little girl. It was more than he could bear."

"One never can trust these nurses for discretion," replied Sholto. "Perhaps I'd better come later."

"No, no, Sholto; it will do him good to see you when he wakes; besides, I want to know your opinion of the case—rest and peace of mind, it seems to me."

"Ah, Bentley, there's no anodyne for that last want."

"You say the child's coming out?"

"Yes, with her aunt. I should think they'd be here shortly."

"That will be the best anodyne," observed Bentley. "I'll leave you with him. I must push on—alas! a new batch of wounded is expected to-day."

Sholto drew a garden-chair near the patient's bed, and watched his friend as he slept.

"Poor Frank," he murmured; "head on arm just as he used to sleep at school. How time flies! It seems only yesterday, the joy of the cricket field, and all its triumphs; and now it's Scutari, and the Victoria Cross, and death. Not one bit altered though—the same man all over; cold and repellent and tender-hearted as a boy; cold and repellent and tender-hearted as man; a stoic on the surface, a woman's heart beneath. Would *she* could see him now in his sore affliction. No; Paris for her, and the feverish revelry of the new empire."

"Margaret! Margaret!" cried the Colonel, painfully, in his sleep, and presently he awoke. Graham started at his voice, and came to the window, but retired back on perceiving Sholto's presence.

"Hullo, old boy!" said Sholto, softly.

"Who is it?" inquired the Colonel.

“It’s Sholto—run across from Pera to see you;” and Sholto laid his hand on the Colonel’s.

“Thanks, old fellow, thanks; it’s very good of you:” and the Colonel grasped Sholto’s hand as firmly as his strength permitted.

“How are you to-day?”

“So-so,” replied the Colonel, feebly.

“Getting on, eh?” said Sholto, cheerfully.

“Or getting off?”

“Yes, yes; getting off the doctor’s hands. Egad! a good joke—bravo, Murray!”

“It does me good to hear the jolly old laugh, Sholto; but at the best I’m not much of it. I’ve been wanting to see you very much.”

“What is it, old fellow? What can I do for you?”

On pretence of mixing some lemonade, the ingredients for which were placed on a small table within earshot of the Colonel’s chair, Graham made excuse to draw near

the speakers. She advanced with anxious effort to catch the words they spoke.

“Sholto,” said the Colonel, feebly, “you once said you would do anything for me I wanted.”

“I did,” replied Sholto, heartily—“the day we left Harrow, and I’ll do it, by God!”

“I knew you would, old friend; it’s nothing for me—but Minnie. I’ve been a fool, Sholto—trusted a lot of speculative scoundrels: I’ve been hard hit; and then the cost of that accursed divorce bill, there’ll be next to nothing for Minnie when I die.”

“As bad as that, old boy?” exclaimed Sholto, with sympathy.

“Only too true—too true,” murmured the invalid, sadly.

“Come, old fellow,” said Sholto, warmly, after a minute’s thought, “take heart. I’ve only one child of my own—Minnie’s age—Minnie shall be my girl. I’ll look after her, my word for it,” and he grasped the Colonel’s hand.

“God bless you, Sholto! The old true grip; the old true heart.”

“From this day forth, Murray,” said Sholto, solemnly, “Minnie’s my daughter as well as yours. Keep your mind at rest on that point. Anything else, old fellow?”

“No, no,” answered the invalid, in evasive tone. “Nothing—nothing.”

“Come, come, there is something. I’m sure there is; be frank with me, Murray.”

“It’s nothing but some stupid fancy in my head. I suppose it comes from taking these opiates. Sholto, I could have sworn that that woman had been here just now.”

“What do you say?” exclaimed Sholto, with surprise.

“That woman—here, in my very presence—or else it is that Graham’s voice, the nurse, sounds exactly like hers.”

“The nurse’s voice! Bless the man!” said Sholto, with a laugh.

“The same tone, I’ll swear,” continued the Colonel with increased vehemence. “For God’s sake, Sholto, don’t let there

be any mistake about this; it would kill me."

"My dear old boy, pooh—nonsense—absurd!"

"But the voice, the voice!" reiterated the Colonel; "my ears could not be deceived. Oh, Sholto, the bare thought of that woman being here utterly upsets me."

Striving to listen with painful effort, Graham insensibly stole still closer to the Colonel's chair.

Sholto marked with alarm the intense excitement of the patient, and he felt it was necessary to put an immediate end to the painful doubt.

"I can't answer for similarity of voices," he replied, in serious tone; "but let us have no mistake about this matter, Murray. Your suspicion is utterly unfounded. I tell you with extreme pain, but I tell you on the best authority, that at this very time, that wretched woman, who was once your wife, is leading an abandoned life in Paris."

At these words, Graham involuntarily

struggled forward, and stifling speech in a suppressed groan, gazed with agonized expression in Dr. Sholto's face. He started when he saw her, but immediately regained his self-possession; he fixed his eyes with stern expression upon hers.

"I repeat, Colonel," said he, in deliberate voice, "that at this very time that wretched woman is leading an abandoned life in Paris."

"Thank God, she isn't here!" exclaimed the Colonel, with intense relief.

Graham sank down beneath the doctor's relentless gaze, and swooned at his feet.

The Sister Superior entered at that very moment, followed at some distance by the *soi-disant* Mr. Leslie. Dr. Sholto went up to the Sister, and pointing to the fainting woman, whispered in her ear, "That nurse is utterly exhausted by hard work; she must leave this hospital forthwith."

CHAPTER II.

NOON.

UNDER an awning, beneath the foliage which shaded the terrace, Colonel Murray lay sleeping, lulled by a lie—strange anodyne; but it had dissipated the horrible fear of the sick man. Far away in Paris—be it so! Anywhere, what matter the whereabouts of such a woman? But not at his bedside. Lulled, too, by the assurance of a true heart, death or life, the idol of his soul, Minnie, was safe in the guardianship of a trusty friend.

A sore burden lay on Dr. Sholto, as he watched at the side of his friend's couch. He was a brave man, and he had never failed in meeting duty face to face; but in

the perplexity of his soul he mourned that he had ever crossed over to Scutari; and yet he had, by Heaven's blessing, averted the terrible disclosure which would have been sure death to his smitten friend. That the woman must go was very clear; and yet she alone had saved her husband's life. But it was his duty to send her away at all hazards, and the slender thread of life must needs be left to the careless fraying of the hireling and the stranger.

And how to meet this woman, branded with an indelible sin, and yet revered by all around as a saint, an angel of mercy and good works, bearing the stamp of a holy mission on her pale and weary face?

Dr. Sholto met her, as he met most people, bluntly and to the point, yet kindly and with an air of deep respect. The Sister Superior had made Mrs. Murray lie down in her own room, and after tending her with the utmost solicitude, had left her in the hope that sleep would presently come with restoring power; but the moment she was

left alone she stole back, drawn by irresistible fascination, to her husband's room. Her fear of Dr. Sholto was lost in anxiety for the invalid. She hurried up to the couch.

"Is he asleep?" she inquired, in anxious tones.

"Soundly asleep, thank Heaven!" and Dr. Sholto led her gently away from the couch. "It is my duty to tell you that you must leave this hospital at once."

"Have mercy on me, Dr. Sholto!"

"I leave this evening; *you* will leave before I leave."

"Let me stay, for Heaven's sake."

"I am inexorable, madam."

"He will die, if I go."

"He will assuredly die, if he discover the truth," replied Dr. Sholto, sternly. "You heard his words; if I had not told a deliberate lie, it would have been his death."

"He shall never know the truth," replied Mrs. Murray, in accents of despair. "I swear it! Never know that I was his wife. Have mercy; you knew me in happy

days ; you kissed me on my wedding-day—his oldest friend ! Have mercy on me now ! ”

“ I must have mercy on him. ”

She felt Dr. Sholto was inexorable ; but still she pleaded in agonized voice.

“ I tell you, I have saved his life—they all say so ; I watched him day and night with ceaseless care. Through all that dreadful time his life was absolutely in my hands. Oh, weary pain ! His head found its only peace on my bosom. ”

Dr. Sholto gave way to an expression of indignation. “ Your bosom ! *His* head on your bosom ! Better he had died ! ”

“ No, Dr. Sholto, ” she answered, firmly ; and for a moment she clung for support to the noble reputation she had won. “ Purged by bitter repentance ; worthy now of doing woman’s highest work ; ” but the next moment brought back anguish and despair. “ What, leave him ! Impossible ; who will care for him as I have cared ? Let me remain a few days longer, ” she pleaded

piteously, "and then I'll go, and never look upon him again."

"Impossible, I say. Why did you place yourself in this terrible position?"

"It was not my seeking," she answered. "I swear it, solemnly. When I heard that he had been brought here, I trembled at the thought lest I might be called to nurse him; shame-stricken, yet dying to see him once more, I dared not venture near his presence; but it was a desperate case, and I was considered the most skilful nurse—lightest hand, where a feather's touch was pain! and the order came for me to be his nurse. I obeyed; it was God's doing, not mine. God's bitterest punishment on my sin; for at last I was taught to know the worth and love I had lost for ever; taught to know too late, the hidden value of that chivalrous heart. Oh, Dr. Sholto! his burning head found fitful rest upon my bosom—close to my heart, and yet the width of the eternal gulf between us! Have mercy! I have done all I could; let me

finish this work and die ! ” She sank down exhausted on a bench.

Dr. Sholto was deeply touched. “ I pity you, indeed I do, from the bottom of my heart ; but still I am bound to act in this matter according to the dictates of common prudence. Colonel Murray is better—more thoroughly himself ; the chances of discovery are thereby increased and are increasing daily ; you would not wish to undo the good work you have done ? ”

“ Heaven forbid ! ”

“ You would not desire to endanger the life your devotion has saved ; go then, at once. I believe you have saved his life—be that your consolation.”

Mrs. Murray felt the force of all that Dr. Sholto urged.

“ I am in your hands,” she said, with resignation. “ I will go ; I will give up the one hope of my miserable existence.”

“ What hope ? ” he asked.

“ His forgiveness.”

“ Impossible ! ”

“I had hoped one day to ask forgiveness for her—his wife. *I* have saved his life, and he knows it; let him, for *my* sake, for Graham’s sake, forgive his wretched wife.”

“Again, impossible; the risk would be too great—you would betray yourself; this must not be done.”

“I bend to your decree.”

“Nay, his safety.”

“Be it so. I will die unforgiven—fit punishment! But how can I go? What excuse?” she asked, in voice of despair.

“What excuse?”

“Your health.”

“I have sworn to die at my post!—can I turn back now? The women I have led on, animated by my example, would laugh me to scorn.”

“Better at all events, deride your weakness than your sin. You must tell him your health is failing; you leave here by my advice to save your own life; in short, you must say that you are bound to think of yourself.”

“Think of myself!” she exclaimed with bitterness, “and I have striven these years past to forget myself. Oh, fearful retribution! thrust back upon myself after all. Enough of self. You promised, if he died, to take care of our child. Bless you for that! Our child—link ’twixt him and me which no divorce can break asunder. Dr. Sholto, I, on my part, give her into your hands with a solemn charge.”

Mrs. Murray spoke in a low deliberate tone, and every word was wrung out with agony. “When Minnie is old enough, when womanhood bursts brightly upon her—when her young eyes are dazzled with this world’s glamour of smile and charm—break in upon that brightness with my story; paint it in darkest colours of truth—the false words which deluded—the false sentiments which lured me on—let her know it all—vain, frivolous, heartless coquette. Have no mercy on me, her mother; for her sake, my child—let those dark thoughts of me be her safeguard—promise!”

“I will tell her at the proper time,” replied Dr. Sholto, solemnly, and he turned away his face to hide a tear.

“Without pity,” she urged with vehemence—“without mercy—holding me up to bitterest scorn and contempt. If she, too, fall, be it on your head. One word more: five thousand pounds stand in my name at Drummond’s, a legacy from my uncle in India, payable to my cheque. That money is hers absolutely.”

“I fear he will not let her touch it.”

“My child as well as his. I am no longer his wife, but I am her mother. I repeat, that money is hers absolutely—I desire to place it in safe hands.”

“But surely,” objected Dr. Sholto, “you will require some of this money for yourself—the interest, at least, during your life.”

“I want money enough to keep body and soul together,” she answered, in a tone of sadness; “I can earn it—and a grave; they’ll give me that. I constitute you her trustee; the interest to be spent on her

education—the principal to be hers when of age. Can you draw such an instrument?”

“I will get it drawn.”

“Thank you; I’ll sign it and go.”

“You will speak to him when he wakes?”

“I promise! One word, Dr. Sholto, before you leave me. I know you will be very kind to Minnie—a firm hand, oh! but very gentle. I know what she is; just touch her heart, and she’s conquered in a moment.”

Dr. Sholto grasped Mrs. Murray’s quivering hand with his honest grasp.

“Tell her some day,” she murmured, the tears falling from her eyes; “tell her, if you can——”

“Yes, dear lady,” he answered, with heartfelt sympathy.

She drew her hand from his grasp, and brushed away her tears. “No, don’t tell her that I loved her, that I carried her little face in my bosom—my one hope, my one consolation—no; heartless, vain, frivolous to the end—tell her that—always that.”

She turned away from Dr. Sholto. "Never on earth," she murmured, "but in heaven—perhaps in heaven;" and she struggled to a seat near the Colonel's couch. Dr. Sholto left her; he felt it was a case beyond man's consolation.

And now once more, and perhaps for the last time, they were alone together. Sleep took away his pain and sorrow; sleep surrendered him into her hands—they were husband and wife again—sound sleep, and she could call him by the old familiar name, in undertones of despairing love and tenderness; she could talk of the old times; she could recall the old scenes of happiness. For her soul's comfort, she could pour into the dull ear of sleep the confession of that sin and suffering which weighed upon her soul; she could kneel at his side, and with lightest pressure on his worn hands, pray for the forgiveness she durst not seek when consciousness returned.

He awoke;—husband and wife were parted—he was Colonel Murray, and she

was Nurse Graham; he awoke, speaking incoherently, as waking from a dream. Oftentimes, to her exceeding comfort, there was a link of sympathy between his dream and her waking thoughts. Her thoughts had been his thoughts in the realm of sleep; hand in hand, as she sat at his bedside, the thoughts of both had travelled, the one in painful wakefulness, the other in soothing sleep, among old memories of the better days.

“Where am I, Graham?”

“Here, Colonel; at Scutari—the hospital.”

“Only a dream, then; it was so vivid, though. I was walking under the cool trees, with the fresh ferns about me, and the clear rills trickling down the valley sides. Were you ever at Lynton, Graham—Watersmeet, by the rustic bridge?”

“Yes, sir.”

It was very strange; her waking thoughts had been wandering amid that pleasant valley.

“That was the spot,” continued the Colonel, “as plainly as if I were there; *she* was walking with me—we often used to walk there in the old time. It was on that very bridge she swore to love me—a lie! a lie! Why dream of a lie? Why wake to be mocked by a lie?” And he turned restlessly on the couch. She raised his head tenderly, and smoothed his pillow, and gave him some cooling drink. “Bless you, Graham!” and he pressed her hand in thankfulness for her service. “It’s getting rather too hot and glary here; I think I’ll go back to my room. Where are the orderlies?”

“They will be here directly.”

And now to her terrible task. She schooled her voice as best she might. “I have something I am obliged to say, Colonel, if you will allow me——”

“What is it, Graham—what is it?”

“I am sorry to say my strength has been failing lately: I fainted this morning.”

“Sholto told me so. Forgive me for not

inquiring—but, alas! illness makes us very selfish. I hope you are better now?”

“For the time, Colonel; but I feel I am quite unequal to my present work. The fact is, I require thorough rest. I must leave the hospital.”

“Leave the hospital!” he exclaimed, in an anxious voice. “Oh, Graham, is it really as bad as that?”

“Dr. Sholto says so; he tells me I shall utterly break down if I remain here a day longer; in short, I must leave at once.”

“If Sholto says so, you must go,” replied the Colonel, in tones of deep regret. “Heaven forbid I should keep you one moment longer; you’ve done too much for me already. I owe my life to you, Graham—my life, I say, to you and God’s mercy——” At this moment Dr. Bentley came his rounds.

“Well, Graham, how are we getting on?” he inquired, briskly.

“The Colonel is just awake, sir.”

“Rather flushed, hey?” observed Bentley,

looking at the patient. "Pulse too rapid—some disturbance in the system."

"It's nothing, doctor," said the Colonel; "only for the moment. Graham tells me she is obliged to leave us; her health is broken down by hard work."

"That all!" exclaimed Bentley, in a tone of affected derision. "Egad! that's the case with all of us. We can't let you go, Graham; you're not half bad enough for that."

"Sholto tells her so," observed the Colonel.

"Sholto be hanged! Sholto shan't deprive me of my best nurse. Let me feel your pulse, Graham—fair enough; wants a little power, perhaps. A tonic will soon set you up."

"Indeed, sir, I fear it's worse than that." Bentley feared so too, and he drew Graham out of earshot of the Colonel.

"You may be somewhat shaken by this hard work," said he kindly; "I don't say you're not. I'll take care you get a longer

spell of rest; but I tell you, if you go, that man won't live. I'm speaking seriously, mind; and besides that, if you desert your post, the rest of the nurses will leave us. My good woman, you *must* stay. Come, that's settled;" and Bentley returned to the Colonel. "Cheer up, my friend! Graham isn't going to leave us just yet. It's a cunning dodge of Sholto's—confound him!—trying to carry off our best nurse. Make yourself quite comfortable, Colonel, Graham will remain with you. Let him have the composing draught as soon as he returns to his room," whispered Bentley in the nurse's ear; "full measure, mind, and for Heaven's sake don't leave us, or the whole hospital will go to the deuce."

The Colonel was presently carried back into his room by the orderlies, his head resting on Mrs. Murray's arm, and the curtains of the window were closed on nurse and patient—husband and wife.

"Poor woman," muttered Bentley, as he watched the nurse's solicitude and care;

“no wonder she’s knocked up—done enough to kill a horse, but, short-handed as we are, I can’t afford to let her go. A touch of the lady in her, I’ll be sworn. Breed’s the thing, after all: an ounce of blood is worth a pound of bone—egad, I must be moving on!”

“One moment!” exclaimed the Sister Superior, as she hurried to catch Dr. Bentley.

“Well, ma’am, anything wrong?”

“Your usual greeting, Doctor.”

“I’m always afraid of seeing you,” replied Bentley, with good-natured *brusquerie*; “your presence is always the harbinger of some misfortune.”

“Ah, Doctor!” replied the Sister Superior, with a smile, “misfortunes usually do bring us together; however, just now I meet you with a happier purpose. The commandant has placed in my hands Colonel Murray’s Victoria Cross, which he has just received from the War Office, for presentation to the Colonel. I want to know when we had better give it to him?”

“Not just now,” replied Bentley. “He’s gone back to his room, a little matter disturbed; let him have a few hours’ repose, after that——” But Bentley was unable to finish his sentence. An orderly came with an urgent requisition for his attendance, and he hurried away.

The Sister Superior beckoned to Travers, who had followed her on to the terrace, but had remained apart during her conversation with Bentley.

“Come, Mr. Leslie, we are alone now. Mrs. Graham—excuse me, Mrs. Leslie, I mean.” The Sister Superior grew somewhat confused.

“No matter names, madam. I am ashamed to sail under false colours, but you know my motive—I do it for her sake. She is here, is she?”

“Close here—that room;” and the Sister Superior pointed to Colonel Murray’s room, at the same time laying a restraining hand on Travers’s arm. “A few minutes—she is in attendance on her patient.”

“Oh, madam!” he exclaimed, in fervent voice, and his arm trembled with emotion, “if you only knew how anxious I am to declare to her my repentance—my sorrow and contrition for past transgressions.”

“I do believe you, sir; but still I must ask your patience—a sad case—you’ve heard of Colonel Murray?”

“Colonel Murray!” exclaimed Travers, with a violent start.

“The engineer officer—the hero of the Victoria Cross—blind, helpless now.”

“You say she is nursing him?”

“More than nursing; her devotion has saved his life.”

“Saved his life!” echoed Travers, deeply moved.

“Yes, sir. Be proud! this is the noble creature you seek; this is the great reward your repentance has won. One moment;” and the Sister Superior went up to the room and listened awhile at the curtains.

Upton Travers *was* deeply interested in all the Sister Superior had said.

Of pleasant, sweet, gentle aspect was Upton Travers—light golden hair, clear blue eyes, and a pleasant smile. He possessed a wonderful power of deception, because he possessed a wonderful power of assimilating the feelings and sentiments of those around him. What others felt, he *felt*. His hypocrisy was not the glaze of the surface, it sprung from the depth of his feelings. It mattered not, if people were religious, he *felt* religious; he readily responded to every enthusiasm of life—sincerity itself could not *feel* more sincerely than he felt—a charming companion, a sort of cunning instrument which lent itself to every touch, and answered in sympathetic tones. With regard to feeling, the *mécanique* of a saint; with regard to heart, the heart of a devil; he believed in one God, and he worshipped one God—himself, and his fears were limited to the fear of bodily pain and discomfort.

Upton Travers had come to Scutari to play a desperate game, and behold, the

trump cards were in his hands. "Is it possible!" he murmured with exultation, "Colonel Murray, and *she* has saved his life!—a dream!—no, I'm awake. Those were the very words."

The Sister Superior returned from the window with an assuring smile on her face. "In a minute or two more I shall be able to restore her to you."

"Bless you, madam, for all your goodness;" and he pressed the Sister's hand in gratitude.

"By the way," continued the Sister, "I've had no opportunity of preparing her for this interview; perhaps I had better break it to her first—tell her that you—her husband——"

"Yes, *her husband!*" he replied with emphasis. "Oh, but not worthy of that sacred name—not worthy—alas, she will refuse that name to me!" and the blue eyes were suffused with tears.

"My good friend, take courage," said the Sister Superior, touched to the heart;

“believe me, it’s not what you were, but what, by Heaven’s mercy, you are now. Leave me with her for a moment ;” and she led him aside. “Once more, courage ! she possesses a noble, generous nature ; she will forgive you, I know she will—there’s my hand on it ;” and she pressed his trembling hand with her own true, heartfelt grasp.

Travers stood aside among the foliage, and the Sister went to the window.

“Graham,” she called, in a low tone.

“Yes, Sister,” replied Mrs. Murray, opening the curtain.

“Is the Colonel asleep ?”

“Soundly, thanks to the draught.”

“You may leave him a little,” said the Sister, placing her arm round Mrs. Murray’s waist, and drawing her away from the room. “I have something very particular to tell you. Ah, dear lady,” she continued in a voice of great tenderness, “you have thought much of others, let others think a little about you. I trust that this day will bring you great consolation. I believe your

present sorrow is only a shadow of past happiness. Have confidence ; this shadow is about to die away in present joy."

"What do you mean, Sister?" asked Mrs. Murray, in great perplexity.

"Your husband."

"My husband! Good God, is the truth known?" she exclaimed, in terrified voice; and she clung for support to the Sister's arm.

"Compose yourself, my dear," said the Sister kindly, "nothing is known; *he* has not breathed one word about the past. For your sake—for both your sakes—he has been silent; but I can guess the whole sad story. He left you—deserted you—but Heaven has touched his heart; he assures me of his sincere repentance."

"He!—who?" asked Mrs. Murray, utterly bewildered.

"Your husband."

"I have no husband!"

"Not even if he repent?"

"I don't understand you."

“He has been with me.”

“His name?”

“For both your sakes he has withheld his name.”

The horrible possibility of Travers having followed her to Scutari flashed into her mind.

“Has that wretch dared to set foot here?” she exclaimed, in a tone of indignation mingled with terror. “I will never see him again—never, never! For mercy’s sake,” she cried, “don’t let that man enter my presence, it’s too fearful! Oh! is there no refuge left for me on earth?”

“Yes,” replied the Sister, somewhat dismayed by Mrs. Murray’s intense emotion; “his repentant heart. Consider, he has followed you here for the purpose of reparation.”

Travers felt the propitious moment had arrived. He came from his hiding-place, and knelt at her feet.

“Margaret, forgive me; I have deeply sinned.”

“That voice!” she exclaimed, with a shudder, and she averted her eyes in horror and disgust.

“Have mercy on him!” pleaded the Sister; “at least, listen to his prayer. Don’t cast him back on despair; may be, your forgiveness will secure his salvation. Remember, we poor sinners all need forgiveness.” And the Sister left them; she rejoiced in the work she had done. “A great wrong, doubtless, followed by a noble Christian forgiveness; God bless them both!” and she went about her hospital work light-hearted, in the reward of a good conscience.

The terrace was quite deserted; all the invalids and hospital attendants, had retired to their respective rooms by reason of the noonday heat.

He remained kneeling, with his eyes bent on the ground.

“Why are you here?—what do you want?” she asked, in tones of loathing and contempt.

“What I dare scarcely hope for,” he answered, in trembling voice—“your forgiveness. Oh! Margaret, I left you in Paris. I was cruel, harsh; but I was ruined, compromised. They were on my track; I was forced to fly.”

“And you left me to perish, to die of want.”

“Don’t remind me of the past; I can’t defend it. I have bitterly repented.”

“A bitter repentance,” she retorted, scornfully, “spent at German gambling-tables.”

“A man must live.”

“And a woman may die,” she answered, bitterly. “I have lived; I, too, have repented. I am no longer Margaret Murray; I am Mrs. Graham, a hospital nurse.”

“This miserable dress!” he murmured. “Oh, shame that you should have sunk so low!”

“So low, and yet far higher than the mistress of Upton Travers.”

“I swore I would marry you as soon as that divorce was gained.”

“Lower still!” she answered, contemptuously.

“Not so bitter with me, Margaret,” he replied in a deprecating tone; and he rose to his feet. “It’s all the reparation I can make. I have followed you here—sought you out for this very purpose; at least an honest woman in the eyes of the world—my wife.”

“*Your* wife! I prefer shame to such honesty.”

“Margaret, have a little mercy!” and tears dimmed his eyes. “I have erred, deeply erred; but I have repented from the bottom of my heart. Come, it’s not too late to realize our old dream of love.”

“Hideous delusion, which lured me to destruction!”

“Not so; we’ll create a new world of our own—my life devoted to your happiness. I have money now, plenty of money. I ask you to share it.”

“Fruit of the gambling-table!”

“No matter; I ask you to share it.

Money enough for every luxury ; not miserable garments like these—not hard, coarse fare—not menial service. Shame on the thought ! I am in earnest, on my honour.”

He did *seem* in earnest, and her heart was touched.

“I am willing to believe it,” she answered, in softened tone ; “I am willing to believe that, in your way, you have repented of the past. I am very happy to think so. I will not utter one word of reproach. I will only make one request—that you leave me.”

He felt her change of tone and manner ; it was a presage of victory.

“Leave you, Margaret ? Impossible !”

“Leave me, and I will forgive the wrongs you have done.”

“Come, Margaret,” he urged, “this is foolish. Come back to the world with me ; there’s brightness and effervescence yet in the cup of life.”

“Your words grate horribly in my ears,” she answered, with a shudder. “That

accursed life! I have repented, if you have not. All I ask is—leave me.”

“Never, Margaret—dearest Margaret—I swear, never!”

“Let me end my task here, and die in peace. I will forgive you—pray for you—only go, pray go!”

“You will not return with me to the world—share my money, be my wife, live a life of happiness and joy?”

“No!—irrevocably, no! I forgive you all my misery—all my bitter sorrow: a large sum of wretchedness to forgive, but I do forgive you. Farewell—my duties! I must leave you now.”

“I must remain,” he answered, in changed tone.

“You cannot remain here.”

“I must,” and he threw himself on a bench.

“Impossible! Your presence will betray me.”

“Be that as it may,” he replied, with dogged resolution.

“Tell the Sister Superior that I have forgiven you—that we have mutually agreed to part.”

“I cannot leave you, Margaret.”

“You have the world before you,” she urged in dismay at his manner; “you have money.”

“No!”

“You said money.”

“Not a penny, I say.”

“You asked me to share your money,” she repeated emphatically.

“I did, but I’d none to share.”

“Liar!” she exclaimed, in the vehemence of her feeling.

“Yes, liar,” he answered calmly; “it’s the truth.”

“What does this mean?”

“It means that I want to share your money.”

“What money?” she asked contemptuously; “my wages here?”

“No, at Drummond’s; don’t prevaricate,” he retorted sharply.

“You knew it, then?”

“I knew it, and therefore I sought you out.”

“Scoundrel!—mean, pitiful scoundrel! You sought me in vain. Thank Heaven, the mask is dragged from your lying face. Listen to me, once for all. That money at my bank is a sacred sum, which shall never be touched by you or me; no, not if we were dying for want of bread.”

He lighted a cigarette whilst she was speaking, and he flung himself back at his ease on the bench. “A good round sum,” he answered, amid whiffs of smoke. “Don’t talk of dying. Five thousand pounds—oh, ye gods, a delicious sum!”

“That money is my child’s fortune; it is sacred to her. Not one penny—not one penny,” she replied, with rapid utterance.

“Plain speaking now, Margaret,” he answered, with a smile. “Not your child’s fortune, but *mine*!”

“Fool!” she exclaimed contemptuously.

“Not fool!—knave, may be—not fool!” he answered, with quiet deliberation.

"Fool or knave, you've had my answer. So it was *my* money you sought. Miserable gamester, you've shown your hand too soon; your cards are played out—go!"

"Pardon me," he answered, inhaling a deep whiff—"a small trump thrown away, that's all. I hold better cards."

"You come here too late, Upton Travers; the game's over," she answered derisively. "I have made Staff-Surgeon Sholto trustee on behalf of my daughter; it only remains for me to execute the deed. He has just left me for the purpose of having it drawn. He will return soon," she added significantly. Upton Travers lighted another cigarette. "I repeat, he will return soon. I've warned you, mind; go, before you are expelled."

"Why expelled?" he inquired with the utmost unconcern.

"You will not dare to face Dr. Sholto."

"Why not? Dr. Sholto has never seen me. No, Margaret Murray," he continued in calm decisive voice, "I beg your pardon,

Margaret Graham, you have *really* repented—that's clear—therefore you are in my power; you are striving, under a false name, to regain your position in society—I defy you to reveal my name to Dr. Sholto."

She felt his words were terribly true. She did not dare reveal his name, which was the token of her shame and condemnation. She felt she was in his relentless grasp; her courage forsook her. No longer scorn and defiance, but humblest prayer.

"Go, I beg and pray! if you have any mercy, go. Dr. Sholto is coming, I see him——"

"Let him come," replied Travers, with perfect unconcern; and, throwing away his cigarette, he rose from the bench. "I shall stay till he goes; meanwhile our conversation can remain in abeyance."

Dr. Sholto had brought the document. "Here's the paper, Nurse Graham," he added with emphasis, being mindful of the presence of a stranger. "Pray who is this gentleman?" he inquired.

“Pardon me, sir, my name is Leslie,” replied Travers, bowing respectfully to Dr. Sholto. “I am agent for the firm of Bertimati and Company, bankers at Galata, correspondents of Drummond and Company, London. I attend Mrs. Graham on business matters by direction of my firm.” He inclined his head deferentially towards Mrs. Murray, and in all ways assumed the bearing of a respectable and highly confidential banking clerk.

“Your presence is most opportune, sir,” observed Dr. Sholto; and, turning to Mrs. Murray, he requested her to peruse the document with care. “Mr. Leslie will, no doubt, be good enough to witness your signature,” he added, turning to Travers.

“Certainly, sir,” replied Travers. “I am here to give every assistance in my power to Mrs. Graham.”

“The matter, sir, is briefly this,” observed Sholto by way of explanation to Travers. “Nurse Graham is desirous of placing certain moneys of which she stands pos-

sessed in my hands for certain purposes needless to specify. I, Dr. Sholto, have agreed to hold these moneys and carry out the provisions of the trust. Well, Graham," he continued, turning to Mrs. Murray, "have you read the deed carefully—does it embody your wishes?"

"I think so—yes," she replied, with a timid, scared look, returning the paper to Dr. Sholto.

"Good. Let's complete the affair at once. Find the Sister; we shall require her signature as a second witness."

"Pardon me, Dr. Sholto," exclaimed Travers in a tone of the utmost deference, "for venturing to interfere in this matter; but in my capacity as agent for Mrs. Graham, I really think I ought, for my own satisfaction, to read over this document before signature; my knowledge of business matters, and general acquaintance with legal instruments of this nature, may possibly be of some avail."

"As you like, sir. Pray read it," replied

Dr. Sholto, somewhat annoyed; but still it was impossible to object to such a reasonable request, and he handed the paper to Travers.

“Have I your permission, madam?” inquired Travers of Mrs. Murray, with the slightest tone of significance in his voice.

“Read it if you will,” she answered, in trembling utterance.

Quietly, deliberately, and with the utmost apparent unconcern, did Travers peruse the paper, making audible comments here and there. “Money—at Drummond’s—amount not stated—purposes of trust not specified—hum!” and he shrugged his shoulders significantly.

“With regard to the trust, sir,” exclaimed Dr. Sholto, somewhat nettled, “Mrs. Graham has given me full instructions, which I am prepared to carry out to the letter.”

“Quite so, quite so,” replied Travers, raising his eyes for a moment from the paper, but in no wise moved by the doctor’s irritation. “So, all moneys—and other

properties whatsoever absolutely in trust to John Sholto, staff-surgeon, etc., etc., etc.—hum!” and Travers returned the paper, with a respectful bow, to Dr. Sholto.

“Well, sir, are you content?” inquired Dr. Sholto, with some asperity.

“Pardon me, doctor,” replied Travers, still retaining his deferential manner, “I see you are not a lawyer; as this is a matter of serious business, involving consequences of great importance, it is my duty to tell you that this deed is not worth the paper it is written upon.”

“I differ from you, sir!” exclaimed Dr. Sholto, thoroughly nettled.

“As agent for Mrs. Graham,” continued Travers, in deliberate voice, “I protest against her signing that document; I decline to be a witness.”

“No matter, sir,” retorted the doctor, “we can get another witness. Nurse Graham, this is not the first assignment I have drawn at a pinch; I tell you it’s a good and valid instrument.”

"Mrs. Graham must choose between us," observed Travers, with perfect calmness.

"Say, Graham, are you prepared to sign it or not?" asked Dr. Sholto, in a tone of irritation.

She stood there irresolute, utterly fascinated by the presence of Travers,—it was on her lips to break away from the accursed enchantment, to declare the truth—no banker's agent, but Upton Travers, who had wrought the grievous wrong! but—that woman who had honoured her—that good, pure, noble Sister Superior would turn aside with scorn, those other women would turn aside with scorn—no saint, but a false, erring wife.

"Your answer, Graham?" asked Dr. Sholto, impatiently.

"Perhaps I had better wait a little," she stammered. "There is no immediate hurry; perhaps it had better be drawn by a professional man."

"Right, quite right; that's my advice," said Travers, approvingly.

“As you will, as you will!” exclaimed Dr. Sholto; and he tore the paper up.

“Pardon me, sir,” said Travers, “my business, which is confidential, will not detain Mrs. Graham long.”

“I will not intrude upon you, sir. Good day.” And Dr. Sholto hurried off, to the horror and dismay of Mrs. Murray.

They were alone again—Colonel Murray, Mrs. Murray, Upton Travers.

“You are in my power now!” exclaimed Upton Travers. “To business, once more, short and sharp. I hold the winning card, and I mean to play it, be the cost what it may. Whom are you nursing in there! I know his name! The Sister Superior has just told me.” And Travers gazed significantly at the Colonel’s room.

She understood his terrible meaning. “Good God!” she exclaimed, “you could never be so cruel—so wicked—the man you have wronged; he lies there betwixt life and death. What, betray me to him? No, no, Upton,” and she clung to him in despair.

"You are not so bad as that. Heaven would never permit such a crime."

"This is earth!" he answered with a scornful laugh.

"Oh, have a little mercy on the woman whose life you have wrecked!" — still clinging to him, she knelt at his feet. "If you ever loved me, I beg and pray for mercy."

"No need of this agitation," he replied, quietly, at the same time edging towards the Colonel's room. "The Sister says you have saved his life; she begs me not to take you away till he has recovered. Well, you can remain; but a cheque for that money I *will* have."

"Never," she cried; "it belongs to my daughter—never, never!"

"You've said that before; repetition is a waste of time. The choice is in your hands. I must be brief."

"What?" she exclaimed; "you would go to him as he lies there, and whisper in his ear that I was his wife? A man

do this!—impossible!—a tiger's nature wrapped in a man's form; a tiger's instinct animating a man's brain; oh, monstrous growth! I tell you, the hand of Heaven would strike you dead."

"Trust to it, if you dare," he answered, derisively, still moving towards the room, notwithstanding all her efforts.

"A step more, and I'll cry for help."

"Raise your voice, and *he* will hear you."

"No—a narcotic; he will *not* hear; the orderlies will come, and drive you out, scoundrel as you are."

"Then I must speak to him myself."

She clung to him, exerting all her strength.

"This is murder!" she cried.

"Have I any weapon?" he answered.

"Weapon? no, only one word—one fearful word."

"Then word for word," he retorted.
"Your written word, a cheque."

"Never!"

"You force my hand—I play my ace,

be it life or death." He flung her from him; but quick as lightning she flew to the window, and barred his progress. No help was at hand; it only needed one fatal word in the sick man's ear—only her strength against his, to ward it off. She gazed around in despair—there was no help. Her eyes fell on a little table which stood close to the window, on which had been placed the materials for making lemonade; in her despair she grasped the table-knife which had been used for cutting the lemon. In a moment, she became strong, fearfully strong.

"Your death, if you advance another step!" she cried. He started back from her in surprise and alarm. This was not the woman he had wronged, the woman whose weakness he had despised—some strange, terrible being animated her form; eyes dilated with fierce animal rage, muscles wrought to utmost tension—the swaying balance of a crouching tiger.

"Curse you, would you stab me?"

“Yes, by Heaven,” she answered. “I’ve strength enough for it. Back, miserable cur!” and he slunk back at her bidding. “Back, I say, as you value your life!” and she kept pressing upon him, impelled by some irresistible force. “Don’t tempt me to the worst. A strange feeling burns in my blood—you’ve roused a hidden nature in my bosom, brutal as your own; touched some hidden spring, and a horrible instinct courses through my brain. I could stab and stab, till your life-blood ebbed away. Better cross the path of a tiger thirsting for man’s blood, than face me now. Back! for Heaven’s sake, back! the horrible thing urges me on! Back, I say—or I shall kill you.”

Upton Travers possessed the courage of a brute; but her rage was a hundredfold stronger than his brutality. He shrank away from her, not daring to turn his back—not daring to lose her eye; he knew it would have been certain death. Big drops of fear stood on his brow.

“The Sister Superior!” he gasped. He caught a moment’s glimpse of the Sister approaching along the terrace.

Mrs. Murray turned her eyes from Travers; the Sister was actually approaching. “Saved!” she cried; “saved!” The fearful force which had animated her frame, suddenly collapsed; the knife fell from her nerveless grasp—the power of her eyes was gone—every muscle was unstrung. Travers breathed again; he felt all danger was over. Languid and exhausted, she staggered forward, with dazed and purposeless expression, and would have fallen helpless at his feet, if he had not hurried forward and caught her in his arms.

A moment’s breathing space—he recovered his self-possession quicker than his breath.

“What’s the matter?” inquired the Sister Superior, anxiously, as she approached them.

“Forgiven, madam! forgiven,” he gasped, in bated breath; and, bending his head, he kissed the swooning woman’s lips with a fervent kiss.

“Thank Heaven!” exclaimed the Sister Superior, her eyes filling with tears of happiness; and she breathed a prayer of gratitude. It was manifest to her that her earnest prayers and kindly efforts had been abundantly blessed.

CHAPTER III.

EVENING.

A cool, refreshing breeze from the sea ; and Upton Travers enjoyed it greatly, lolling at his ease in a cane chair on the terrace, and smoking a cigar with evident gusto. A grand sunset also—the full crimson bathed the terrace, and coloured every object with its radiance. Travers had a deep appreciation for the loveliness of nature. He gazed with rapture on the bars of dark purple, fringed with burning gold, on the distant lakes of glowing ether, on the islands and cloud mountains of the upper world. Tears of sensibility stole down his cheeks. “Pshaw !” he exclaimed, wiping away the tears. “It’s very lovely, yet what is it

after all but moisture, the result of evaporation, not really more wonderful than these tears ; part and parcel of that same wonderful thing, moisture. What are we men and women but a good deal of moisture, a little carbon, and many illusions ; a given column of water, and a residuum of ash ? *Voilà tout !*” he exclaimed, in a tone of regret, as he brushed the ash from his cigar, and blew some of the grey dust from his sleeve. “ And yet, hang me, if the illusions don’t seem more real than anything else—ultimate sublimation of cell and tissue. I wonder whether they remain component parts of the water or of the ash ?” Travers was amused with the query—anything, in fact to while away time. He had, as was his wont, calmly reviewed the situation in which he stood, and laid the matter quietly to rest until action was required.

The result was satisfactory enough ; he had been foiled, but not vanquished. Nay, not foiled ; he had made a *reconnaissance* in force, but he had not risked a serious battle

—a *reconnaissance* which had tested the weakness and strength of the adversary. He reasoned the matter thus: “I didn’t believe enough in her repentance, there I was wrong; a little more hypocrisy would have opened a better approach; anyhow, nothing could have sapped her love for that man. There’s my strong point—my winning card! Egad! I didn’t know the spring I touched when she turned upon me with all the fury of a tigress—that weak, frivolous woman a tigress! who’d have guessed it? A curious psychological study; these unexpected problems give a zest to life. She would have stabbed me, too—by Heaven she would! All the better, she has revealed the intensity of her feelings. That five thousand pounds is mine! I have only to stand before that man in her presence, and the cheque will be signed then and there, no doubt of that; cool head, and steady hand, and I *must* win.”

The Sister Superior entered on the terrace from the Colonel’s room. She stood awhile

by the curtains and watched Travers with the greatest interest; she was deeply touched by the traces of tears in his eyes—the bitter memories of that sad past, repentance and reparation for the future. She approached him, and laid her hand gently on his shoulder. “I’m sorry I can’t let you see her now,” she said, in sympathetic tones. “The Colonel is going to be brought out on the terrace; the cool fresh air of the evening always soothes him; and he’s so fond of listening to the regimental band which plays after sunset, old English tunes, usually. As soon as he is comfortably settled, another nurse will replace your dear wife, and then she will be free to join you. There’s my sitting-room at your service; you’ll be at peace there.”

“You are very good, madam,” replied Travers; “but I am obliged to run away directly for a few hours to Galata on pressing business.”

“You would like to see her before you go,” observed the Sister in a somewhat

embarrassed manner. "I *could* call her out, though of course, the affair being still a secret, it's rather awkward, you see——"

"Don't disturb her, pray," replied Travers. "I said I would not interfere, for the time at least, with the sacred duties she has undertaken; besides, it is perhaps for the best, after the agitation she has endured, that we should not meet again to-day. Her forgiveness was not lightly won—you understand my motive—I shall return to-morrow morning; be kind enough to tell her this, with my best love. Oh, madam," he exclaimed with deep fervour, "I can never sufficiently acknowledge your goodness to her and to me!"

"Not another word of thanks, I beg," replied the Sister, touched by his warmth. "I can never do too much to further her happiness."

"By the way," asked Travers, "shall I have any difficulty in re-entering the hospital? The sentry made some demur to-day."

"There need be no difficulty," replied the Sister. I will procure an order from the commandant. Dear me, how can I explain the affair to him? I do wish this dreadful secret was at an end."

"A little longer, for *her* sake, I beg," answered Travers.

"Very naturally the commandant would want to know," urged the Sister.

"Is there any pass you could give me," suggested Travers, "or lend me for a day or two?"

"I'm afraid not; I've only my special pass."

"Depend upon it, madam, that pass would be perfectly safe in my hands."

"I have never parted with it," replied the Sister; "however, this is a very special occasion." She took the pass from her pocket-book, and placed it in his hands. "Please to be very careful of it."

"Most careful, madam, be assured of that. Thank you for this additional mark of your confidence. Is Dr. Sholto still with the Colonel?"

“He is; but he’ll have to start directly; his leave is almost up.”

Travers had gained his point with the Sister—the hospital was open to him at any hour he chose to enter; it now only remained for him to keep up his assumed character with Dr. Sholto, and, further, to deceive the doctor into the belief that he was really about to leave for Galata.

Dr. Sholto followed the Sister on to the terrace, and Travers withdrew.

“Well, ma’am,” exclaimed Sholto in cheerful voice, “I really think we may fairly venture to give him his nobly won reward this evening. He’s enjoying his soup and the glass of old brown sherry. We won’t make any fuss about the affair—as quietly as possible; I should dearly like to see it given to him, poor fellow. I shall stop till the last moment. By Jove! we mustn’t forget he’s Bentley’s patient, though; Bentley ought to have the responsibility.”

“You doctors are so dreadfully punc-

tilious," said the Sister, with a smile. "I'll go and find Dr. Bentley."

"Allow me to go; you must be tired."

"We nurses don't understand the word," replied the Sister energetically, and she started off on her quest.

"How splendidly that woman works!" exclaimed Sholto with admiration. "Pay people wages, and they shirk; make conscience their paymaster, and they'll do your work for nothing—economical labour system, if it could only be carried out on a large scale."

Mrs. Murray was utterly aghast at the thought of Dr. Sholto's departure. He was the only person in whom she could trust, the only protector to whom she could cling. As soon as the Sister was fairly out of sight, she hurried up to Sholto.

"For God's sake, don't leave me!"

"What's the matter, dear lady," he answered, kindly.

"That man—has he gone?" she asked, anxiously.

“Your agent?—why, here he is,” answered Sholto, as Travers approached them from his lurking-place. Mrs. Murray cowered away.

“I desire to apologize, Doctor, for my undue warmth about that document,” said Travers, in deprecatory tone.

“No apology is needed,” replied Sholto, somewhat stiffly.

“I feel I ought to make one,” persisted Travers, “and I do so most fully.”

“If apology be needed, it ought to come from me,” answered Sholto, touched by the frankness of Travers. “I was, I fear, hasty—huffy. I beg in return to apologize to you, sir.”

“I am profoundly touched by your good feeling, said Travers, bowing respectfully. “And now to business, if you will permit me. I leave here directly for Galata. Will you allow me to wait on you to-morrow morning with a draft assignment duly drawn at our office?”

“Good suggestion,” replied Sholto. “It

is certainly better that the document should be drawn by a professional man."

"Less chance for the lawyers to trip us up hereafter. I understand the substance of Mrs. Graham's wishes. What hour will be convenient for you to-morrow Doctor?"

"Twelve o'clock."

"Staff-Surgeon Sholto, Royal Hospital, Pera, I believe?"

"Yes; Mustapha Pacha's palace."

"I shall be with you, Doctor. Pardon me, I have one word to say to Mrs. Graham;" and Travers approached Mrs. Murray.

She shrank involuntarily from him as he whispered in her ear with incisive clearness, "I think you were going to be foolish enough to betray me to Sholto. Think well of it. The net has closed round you. In the belief of the Sister Superior you have received me as your repentant husband; let my name be divulged, and you will become doubly infamous in her eyes. I wish you good evening," he added, in accustomed

tones, bowing most respectfully to the tortured woman.

“Twelve o’clock to-morrow, Doctor!”

“Good evening, sir—thank you,” replied Sholto; and Travers, raising his hat respectfully, left the terrace.

Sholto did not perceive Mrs. Murray’s state of trepidation.

“I have arranged everything with Bentley for your departure,” he said, kindly. “I have persuaded him that you require perfect repose. You are to come over to us; we have a nurses’ home, you know.”

“Thank God! she exclaimed. “But when?”

“To morrow—I shall come and fetch you.”

“This evening; for mercy’s sake, this evening.”

“It’s impossible, my dear lady; I must make arrangements for your reception.”

“This evening,” she persisted—“you said this evening.”

“Utterly impossible,” he replied, with decision.

“That man will return,” she exclaimed, in terrified tone. “Save me! save me!” and she clung desperately to Sholto.

“What—your agent?” he answered, with surprise.

“That man is not my agent—not from Bertimati’s—it’s all a lie; that man is Upton Travers.”

“Upton Travers! What does this mean?” he asked, in a tone of severity.

“He has come here to extort that money from me; he threatens to reveal my presence here to Colonel Murray.”

“Scoundrel!” exclaimed Sholto, with indignation. “How did he gain admittance?”

“He deceived the Sister with a specious story that he was my husband—that he had deserted me—that he had repented.”

“Liar! Egad! if I had only known this, I would have choked the life out of his cursed body.”

“Don’t let him come here again,” she exclaimed piteously. “I shall die if he

does. I have passed through a fearful ordeal; my being is shattered to its very depths. He strove to gain access to the Colonel's room. I baffled him, thank Heaven!—but in the struggle I fainted. Oh, horror, I returned to consciousness in the coil of that man's arms; his accursed lips were pressed to mine! I was helpless—the good Sister stood smiling on my agony, which she deemed the emotion of new happiness—helpless in the sense of past sin, crushed in soul, as the serpent crushes a man's body in its loathsome folds. A little more, and the end will come.” She sank into a chair and clasped her hands over her face.

“Scoundrel! if we meet—by Heaven! if we meet,” exclaimed Sholto, significantly, as he involuntarily clenched his fists. “My dear lady,” said he tenderly, “be assured, you are safe with me, I will protect you; have no fear of this vile wretch.”

“Only let me go with you, I beg and pray.”

“Gently—compose yourself. It is impossible for you to leave here this evening; indeed, you will be safer under this roof.”

“He will return when you have gone,” she answered, in despairing voice.

“Trust to me—I will see the commandant. I will undertake that strict orders are immediately given that no one be admitted to the hospital without a special pass. On my return to Pera, I will make effective arrangements for your reception. You shall be transferred to my own hospital. Let that scoundrel venture there if he dare.”

“If I am transferred to your hospital, you will have to tell the truth to Dr. Bentley and the Sister,” she answered mournfully. “They will think of me with scorn and contempt. I have striven so very hard; shall I never be able to escape from the consequences of that sin?”

“My dear lady,” said he, tenderly, and he took her hand in his, “I *must* tell the truth, even if it be very bitter; believe

me, it's the safest course—the cleverest lies always end in confusion worse confounded. I know the truth, and I respect and honour you. Be sure those two worthy people will do so also when they know your story. I have not time now to speak to them as I should wish to speak. Tomorrow morning, count on me—till then be assured you are quite safe here.”

She pressed his hand in token of her submission. “My truest blessing upon you, good, true friend to him, to me, to my child.”

The Sister returned from her mission to Dr. Bentley.

“It's all right, Doctor!” she exclaimed, cheerfully; “Dr. Bentley leaves the affair entirely in your hands.”

“Good! then we'll give it to him forthwith,” exclaimed Sholto. “Let him be brought out on the terrace. I shall be back in a few minutes; I've a word or so to say to the commandant,” he added, with a significant glance at Mrs. Murray.

"I suppose the Colonel is all ready?" inquired the Sister. "By the way, Mr. Leslie desired me to say that he was called back on pressing business to Galata. He wouldn't let me call you out; he does not wish the secret to be known yet." The Sister went up to the curtains, and partly drew them open.

Mrs. Murray shuddered with disgust at the words of the Sister. There was only too much reason in all that Dr. Sholto had urged—better tell the truth, however heart-rending the task, than be a puppet to the lies of Travers. She resolved to tell the Sister the whole sad story, and trust to her noble love and mercy; but the resolution was baffled by the voice of the Colonel.

"Graham! Graham!" he cried impatiently, "where are you?"

"Here, Colonel;" and she threw open the curtains.

"I'm ready, Graham, for my evening's parade on the terrace; fine evening, is it?"

"A lovely, calm evening, with a cool air from the sea," replied Mrs. Murray.

“Where’s Dr. Sholto?”

“He’ll be here directly, Colonel.” Sholto returned at that moment. “The Colonel has been inquiring for you, Doctor,” said Graham.

“Here I am, Murray; haven’t got long to stay, though. Come, let’s help you on to the terrace—Graham will assist;” and the Colonel’s couch was accordingly wheeled on to the terrace, Graham carefully supporting the invalid’s head, which she propped up with a pillow.

“Is your head comfortable, Colonel?” she asked tenderly, hiding her tears from the Sister as best she could.

“Very comfortable, thanks. I won’t keep you any longer; I require nothing else.”

“Go and rest a little, dear lady,” whispered the Sister, kindly pressing her hand; but Mrs. Murray, not trusting herself to reply, retired apart into the Colonel’s room.

“Will *you* give the cross to him?” whispered the Sister to Sholto.

“No, ma’am—from *your* hands.”

“You are his oldest friend. I am sure he would like best to receive it from you.”

“Be it so;” and Sholto took the little case containing the cross from the Sister.

“It’s very good of you, Sholto,” said the Colonel, “to stop so long with me. It has been a great pleasure, I assure you—done me real good, old fellow; but you mustn’t forget your duty to your patients, mind.”

“All right, my boy,” answered Sholto, cheerfully; “I’ll take care of them, and of you too. I must be off in another few minutes or so, but before I start I am going to have a bit of pleasure on my own account. Last time I was here I read you that splendid notice in the *Gazette* about the Victoria Cross, and now they’ve sent out the cross itself.”

“Have they, indeed?” exclaimed the Colonel, his pale face flushing instantly with excitement and emotion.

“The commandant wanted to present it to you himself,” continued Sholto—“make

a grand business of it, you know; but we thought, old fellow, you weren't quite in a state for much fuss and palavering. Better do the thing in *mufti*, eh?"

"Quite right, Sholto—quite right. I'm very glad they've sent it, though," he added, in heartfelt words. "Who's got it?"

"I have. I'm going to have the pleasure and honour of giving it to you," answered Sholto; and he came close to the couch.

"One minute, Sholto," and the Colonel waved back the Doctor's hand; he kept silence for a moment, and then he added, "we'll have a little ceremony over the affair, after all. Where's Graham?"

"In your room, Colonel," replied the Sister.

"Graham, I want you, please;" and Mrs. Murray came trembling to the side of the couch.

"I am here, Colonel," she gasped, with effort.

"Graham," said the Colonel, in a voice

of emotion, "our good Queen has sent me the Victoria Cross. It's a very great honour—no man could desire a greater. I want *you* to give it me, because your great care and devotion have, by Heaven's blessing, enabled me to live long enough to receive it; and I assure you, I am very glad, and I esteem it an honour also, to receive it from your true, honest hands!"

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Sholto. "Well spoken, by Jove!" and he placed the cross in Graham's hand.

"God support me!" she murmured. "I cannot speak to him," she whispered to Sholto. "This is too much for me."

"Give it to him, that's all you need do," answered Sholto, kindly.

She placed the cross in the Colonel's hand. "Now clasp it on my breast," he said. She fastened the cross on his breast. "Thanks, thanks—your hand, Graham." She gave him her hand, which he held awhile firmly grasped. "Would to Heaven that that poor drummer-boy, whose life I

saved in that assault, to be lost in the hospital, had had such a nurse as you, and all the comfort you have afforded me! God bless you, Graham!" She tottered away from the couch, but Sholto placed his arm round her waist, and tenderly led her away.

"The commandant has issued the order," he whispered in her ear; "be assured you are perfectly safe. To-morrow I shall come for you—farewell." He left her sitting on a chair in the Colonel's room, and returned to the couch.

"Well, Murray, I must positively say good-bye now—time's up. Keep a good heart, old boy; stick to the brown sherry—it's the right sort of tippie. You'll soon pull up, I'll warrant. Remember, Minnie will be due very shortly. I shall run over again soon."

"Good-bye, Sholto," replied the Colonel, warmly. "Thank you for all you've done and said. Good-bye, true friend." With a hearty shake of the hands, the friends parted.

“Take care of Graham,” Sholto whispered earnestly to the Sister; “she wants every care.” With a cheery good-night he left the terrace, and returned to his noble work at Pera.

“Does us all good, I declare!” exclaimed the Sister, “his bright, pleasant manner, and noble, honest face! How well the cross looks on the white, doesn’t it, Graham? Ah, Colonel, be proud—the whole wealth of the world couldn’t buy that little bit of bronze! It’s a happiness to think there are things in this world worth more than gold!”

“By Heaven, madam!” exclaimed the Colonel, “I am proud and happy too, and I thank you all for your goodness and attention to me!”

“Then we are happy also,” replied the Sister. “Well, I must be off on my rounds. Graham will stay with you till Simpson is able to relieve her.

Husband and wife were again alone.

The thought of leaving him was very

terrible, but still more terrible the thought that he must never be told the truth—that to the bitter end the lie must be acted out.

“Graham, he murmured, languidly, “are you there?”

“Yes, Colonel.”

“I wonder whether the account of my receiving the Victoria Cross will get into the French papers?”

“It will be very generally known, no doubt.”

“Of course, in England,” he answered; “but the French papers—*Galignani*, for instance?”

“Very probably—but why, Colonel?”

“That woman is in Paris, Graham. I should like her to read it. I think perhaps she would feel some sorrow, some remorse. Pshaw! that whirl of gaiety and vile dissipation.”

“You are so far right, Colonel—that woman, who was once your wife, is in Paris.”

“What do you know about her?” he asked, in excited tone.

“I will tell you,” she replied, with desperate effort to conceal her agitation. “That woman is in Paris!—Dr. Sholto said in my hearing, and I was utterly overcome when I heard him say so—leading an abandoned life. That woman is in Paris, *dying* in a hospital!”

“How do you know this?”

The lie which, in her despair, she had resolved to tell him, if the opportunity ever arose—and in a lie lay her last hope of pardon—came readily to her lips.

“I passed an apprenticeship in nursing at the Hôtel Dieu. I formed a deep friendship with one of the chief nurses—we correspond—she knows my work; I know hers—that woman is dying in her care.”

“Not leading a wicked life, you say?”

“*Not* leading a wicked life!” she answered, with feverish emphasis.

“Thank God for that!” he exclaimed, with evident relief. “Is she very, very ill?” he asked, after a pause.

“Dying!” she answered. And it was a true answer: death was indeed at work among the fine tissues of her heart.

“What does that nurse say?” he inquired.

“She asks, is there any hope that that woman can be forgiven by the man she has so deeply wronged—any hope that her miserable deathbed can be soothed by the knowledge of *his* forgiveness?”

“Graham, I can’t forgive her—I can’t!”

“I will write that to my friend,” she answered; and she crouched down at the side of his couch in hopeless despair.

“Why should I forgive her?” he asked, with irritation. “Look at the misery she has caused!”

“She has bitterly repented—the nurse says that.”

“Repentance is not reparation! Why haven’t you mentioned all this before?”

“I did not dare; your state of health forbade it. You are stronger now.”

Once more a ray of hope—one last effort

to win his pardon. She nerved herself as best she might: she drew together her shattered power for the supreme effort.

“You say you owe your life to me. You wished to give me some acknowledgment of your gratitude. I ask you for something very, *very* precious: I ask you for *my* sake, to forgive *her*. Oh, Colonel Murray, think well of it: *dying unforgiven!* I tell you that nothing can soothe that pain; it gnaws through all the opiates; it begins its torture when bodily anguish is lulled. Have mercy on this woman, for my sake! Remember, for your sake, I, a woman as she is, have passed sleepless nights—watching through your sleep—watching through all your pain and anguish——” Still he made no response; and the awful words rose before her: “Never on earth—never in heaven!” She fell on her knees, and prayed silently that his heart might be touched.

“Graham,” he said, “I could never meet her again; it would be my death.”

“You *will* never meet her again,” she answered. “Dying, I say.”

“What would you have me do?”

“A few words on a scrap of paper, that’s all.”

“Fetch pen and paper!”

Her prayer was answered. She fetched the writing materials from his room, laid the blotting-paper on his knees, and held the pen in her hand.

“Tell me what to say, Graham; I feel very exhausted.”

“I, Colonel Murray,” she answered, in trembling tones, “forgive that woman who was once my wife, the wrong she has done me.”

“Guide my hand,” he murmured, striving painfully to govern the pen.

She held his worn hand in hers, guiding it as he wrote.

He repeated the words which she had dictated: “I, Francis Murray, forgive that woman who was once my wife the wrong she has done me.”

“Sign it,” she said, with beating heart; and she guided his signature, “Francis

Murray." She took the pen from his hand—she was forgiven! She did not dare kiss him: forgiven, yet no loving kiss of absolution. But she was forgiven. She knew her sin was loosed. In *his* voice she had heard the voice of Heaven—through his lips, consecrated by a great wrong, had been pronounced a full and perfect absolution.

"Remove the blotting-book," he said, in a wearied voice. "You will send it to her, Graham?"

"She will have it, be sure of that." She thrust the paper into her bosom, close to her heart.

The regimental band began to play on the promenade below, and "Home, sweet Home" was wafted on the wind, its tender sweetness swelling on the fitful breeze, or lapsing into plaintive murmur in the calmer air.

"I'm glad I've done it, Graham," said the Colonel, after a pause of thought—"glad I have forgiven her. Thank you for speaking as you did."

The Sister Superior hurried on to the terrace, and drew Mrs. Murray aside. "His child has arrived," she whispered.

"What?"

"His daughter—most unexpectedly—some muddle about the letter. A sweet child, poor dear; so anxious to see her father! You break it to him very gently; I'll go back to her. Colonel," exclaimed the Sister, "Graham has something very particular to say to you, only you must promise to be very calm and composed, or Dr. Bentley will never forgive us!" and the Sister hurried away.

"What is it, Graham?" asked the Colonel, eagerly; "what's the Sister been telling you?"

"Your daughter," she answered, with painful effort, "has arrived."

"What—Minnie?" he cried in a voice of exultation.

"Your daughter."

"Oh, Graham, this is happiness! the only thing I wanted. Where is she?"

“With the Sister.”

“They must bring her to me directly.”

“Directly,” she answered; and *he* would see her—the daughter *she* must never see.

“You’ll see her, Graham,” he exclaimed, joyfully. “I’m so glad you’ll see her; she’s such a darling. I know you’ll love her. You’ll be her nurse, Graham; mind, her nurse.”

“I shall be very pleased to see her some time or the other; I’m too fatigued to stay now,” she stammered; and her breath grew thicker and thicker.

“Where’s papa?” cried a little eager voice in the distance.

“That’s her voice, Graham; don’t you hear? Fetch her, Graham; do fetch her,” he exclaimed, impatiently.

“Oh, my God,” she cried, in her agony; “last drop of the bitter cup—my child—he will kiss her—he will hold her in his arms.”

“Here, Minnie; here, darling!” cried the Colonel; and the child, breaking away

from the Sister, flew with eagerness into his arms.

The Sister turned back, with tears in her eyes. Father and child were locked in a close embrace. The mother gazed at them in an agony of despair, and then turned away. She staggered back; good Dr. Sholto was not at hand to hold her in his arms. But the purpose of her life was consummated; she had freely spent health and strength in a holy cause; she had won her pardon, and His minister of mercy was at her side to save her from all burden of future sorrow. She sank to the ground.

"It's all dark," she murmured, in faintest tones—"thick darkness! Where am I? A light shines through the darkness. Why, this is home once more. He, and I, and Minnie; together, for ever together. Oh, joy—endless joy! But this Light, this great Light, brighter than the sun—Oh Lord, merciful Lord!" and the angel of death folded her in his arms of infinite love.

Father and child, in their happiness, did

not know that she was dead, or had even fallen to the ground. "Home, sweet Home!" sounded pleasantly in their ears, and lent a sweet accompaniment to their eager greetings.

Travers, who had in the meantime stealthily returned, and was watching the scene with devilish purpose, saw her fall. He stole to her side. "Dead, or fainted?" He laid his accursed hand on her heart. "Dead!" He was baffled at the moment of victory—there lay Margaret Murray—nay, there lay the *body* of Margaret Murray—but Margaret Murray, with the *illusions* and the solid gold, had slipped through his grasp. He rose with a curse on his lips—to what end a curse in dead ears?—and left the hospital. The good Sister, to her great marvel, never beheld him again. What became of him? No matter! Let him go his way to the Hell of an exquisitely trained capacity for sensual enjoyment fed on the dry husks of abject penury.

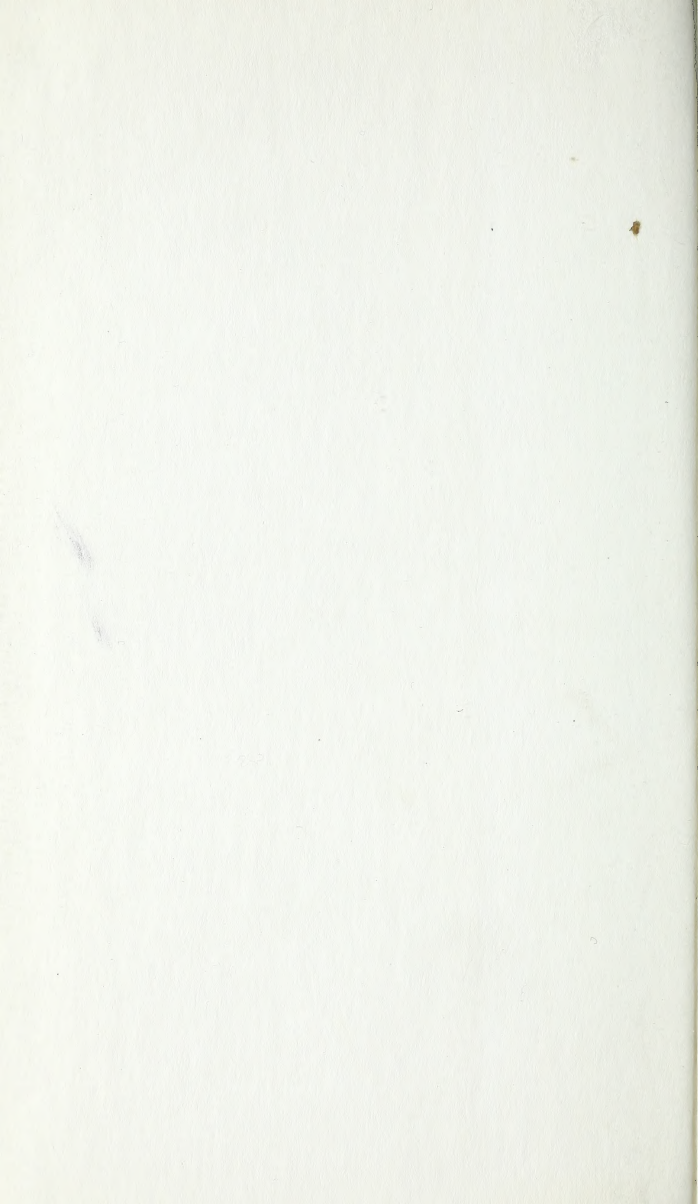
Dr. Sholto followed the dead woman to her grave, together with Bentley, the Sister, and the commandant. The Union Jack was her pall, and four brave noble people were her mourners-in-chief; and many tears were shed by the women she had animated by her example and courage.

Dr. Sholto held his peace, intending on some future day, if ever Colonel Murray grew well and strong, to reveal the truth; but, *Dieu dispose*—the truth was never revealed. Long before the invalid grew well and strong, Dr. Sholto, ever faithful, fell a victim in his brave fight against disease and misery; and *his* daughter became the daughter of Colonel Murray. And so it fell, that Colonel Murray never knew that the woman who had saved his life, and restored his lost faith in womanhood, was the wife of early days who had been faithless to her marriage vow.

“Who could Nurse Graham have been?” the child would often ask in after days, as child and father sat together talking over the sad days at Scutari.

“I can’t tell, my darling; we never shall know here on earth. But I do know she was the best and truest woman I ever met; and I believe she *sacrificed* her life for my sake.”

THE END.



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